Book 6
Cool Kid Bruno

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Note: Some sections contain different languages, specifically in Chapter 11. Use Google Translate or any translation means in order to decode what the character means.

Warning: This book may contain sensitive topics and swearing.

Chapter 1
Ice Cream

The sun opened its eyes and yawned from rising above the sky. As it does so, Bruno woke up, rising straight out of his bed from the sound of his alarm. He smiled and turned to his calendar, which was across the room from the bed. He crossed out “November 9”, then looked at the date of “November 10” with glorious eyes.

He spun across the room, then slammed his door opened, before his brother could even walk to him. “Huh?!”, Piper exclaimed as Bruno took his way to the stairs and into the bathroom, still in his pajamas, before realizing that he needs to eat first.

Bruno took his cereal and poured it into the bowl, with the milk soon flowing the same way. He turned on the TV and started watching cartoons. His parents, walking to the kitchen, saw their son happily watching cartoons with Piper. Bruno noticed the presence of his parents, turned his body to them and greeted them, “Good morning, mom and dad!”. His smile turned to the vibrant cartoon on screen. His parents seemed concerned, but shrugged off the sight anyways.

Bruno continued his routine by brushing his teeth and getting himself dressed up. He ran downstairs, took his backpack and MP3 player, kissed his mother goodbye and ran to the bus with his brother. He even went faster than Piper! “Geez! Bruno, what’s going on today?”, Piper asked. Bruno smiled, looking straight at his brother. “Oh, you’ll see”, he solemnly said. Piper gulped, hoping that it’s nothing too bad.

Bruno reached to the bus and suddenly gave the bus driver a high five, which brightened up the driver's face. Bruno danced his way to his seat that is beside Blossom. Blossom giggled when Bruno started to sit. "What's so funny?", Bruno asked once the bus started moving. He glanced at Blossom with his eyes. Blossom giggled a bit more, then taking her face away from Bruno. "It's nothing!", she answered, following a small giggle.

Throughout the bus ride, Blossom continued staring at her other side; Not at the window, but at Bruno. She was amused by Bruno's sudden positive energy, but wasn't confident enough to talk to him. She only stared at the side of Bruno's music-listening face.

Meanwhile, Bruno was listening to pop songs, mainly those of Taylor Swift. Bruno glanced at Blossom at some point of the ride, but she immediately made herself lose eye contact with him. That caused Bruno to look back at the window and listen to his music. Blossom led out a heavy sigh of relief and continued to stare at Bruno. She sighed soon after, with a softer tone.

When the bus stopped, everyone got out of the door in a line, strangely enough. Bruno and Blossom went together. Bruno stared at Blossom's concerned eyes, then she started to blush. Before he knew it, Blossom looked straight at Bruno in the face. "Bruno?", Blossom asked, confused. Blossom turned her entire body towards Bruno's direction. "What? It's nothing!", Bruno assured, almost stuttering. He tried to look away from Blossom, but he could only see the concrete ground. "Hey, Bruno", Aster greeted, almost sighing.

Once Bruno heard that familiar voice, he jumped. "Oh, Aster! Good morning", Bruno greeted back. He had a short chuckle afterward. "Right, Vlad told me-". Aster got stopped by Bruno walking away, towards the building. Aster froze on the spot while Blossom was only staring at Bruno. Then the school bell rung.

“Oops! I think it’s time, Asty”, Blossom giggled. Aster twitched his eyes, then had red eyes glaring at Blossom. “Don’t call me Asty…”, he grunted. Blossom giggled even more. “If you don’t call me Bloss again!”, Blossom responded. “Now, catch me if you can!”, she taunted as she started to run towards the building. Aster growled and followed Blossom, galloping towards her.

Later onto the day, it was after sparring class and into lunch. The students were gathering up towards an ice cream truck that was conveniently and intentionally parked right next to the field of the school. The ice cream men are smart for making this decision, since children love ice cream. If any ice cream truck would be parked in front of a school, then a boom in sales would be expected. Who doesn’t love ice cream? Unless they’re lactose intolerant or simply allergic to milk.

The scent of ice cream drives the Class 2 members crazy. They were rushing, many were pushing to be the first in line. Fortunately for Carly, she was the first in line of 24 children. “Haha! You losers sure are slowpokes!”, Carly teased. The students were driven off by Carly’s teasing—even Sarah was upset! “Why can’t you give some space for me at least?”, Sarah asked. Carly shrugged as she pays for the ice cream. “Chocolate, please”, she blinked with a pleasing face. She strolled away with her cone in hand, licking the ice cream away, not even giving any eye contact to any of her classmates.

Meanwhile, Bruno just came in, only to see his classmates go berserk over this ice cream truck. “What the? Since when was an ice cream truck parked here!?”, Bruno exclaimed. Carly laughed as she was licking her scoop. She walked up to the puzzled boy. “Since Math class? How are you so out of touch?”, Carly asked. She snickered soon after. “Oh wait! I know why—you’re a moron!”, she laughed out loud. Bruno grizzled in his brain, not even trying to say a word in order to not cause any drama or outcry.

"Hey, I don't know about this truck either. Would you say that **I'm** an idiot?", a distant voice asked. Alex came in from the shadows of the door, seemingly sweating from the sparring. Vlad soon followed out, panting out loud and taking a seat in a nearby bench. Carly squeaked at the sight of Alex. "Err. No! I was just… joking! There's no way that a star student like you could ever even be close to stupid!", she chuckled. She ran off once Alex took a step towards her. Carly knew that if she even said a bad word about Alex, Mrs. Garcia would take her down as her mother. "Psk. And she says everyone is pathetic", Alex said to himself.

Alex looked at Bruno, who still seemed shock. "Well, have you got any money?", Alex asked. "I do. 5 bucks. Do you want some ice cream?", Bruno asked. Alex nodded and giggled. "I'm sort of tired after all that sparring! That made me hungry", he embarrassingly admitted. Bruno giggled. As soon as Bruno took out his money and walked towards the declining line, Vlad called out, "I want ice cream too!".

Vlad ran towards Bruno, still panting. "Ah, hungry too huh? And let me guess: You don't have any money?", Bruno asked. Vlad nodded with embarrassment. "By the way, I want chocolate ice cream", Alex said. "And I want blueberry!", Vlad added. Bruno looked at his money, counting it. "Alright!", he replied. Bruno walked beside the line, being one of the many students waiting for the precious ice cream. Oddly enough, none of the other students were devious enough to even come in for the line. "Hey, when does lunch start?", Vlad asked. Alex thought about it for a moment. "12:45. It's the next period. Why'd you ask?", Alex asked. "Oh, I just want to know, because, you know, everyone is eating now!", Vlad answered. Alex chuckled. "Alright", Alex said. Alex soon looked at Vlad with soft and smiling eyes. It's as if Vlad had… changed in Alex's eyes.

After a lot of waiting, Bruno finally gave the boys and himself the ice cream. "Well, I guess this is good enough for lunch!", Vlad said. The

three started eating their way in. Bruno looked at Vlad, confused. “Hey, why can’t you buy some with your friends?”, Bruno asked. Vlad paused his licking. “Team Toxic? Well, I just want to spend some time with my new classmates, so I might as well just eat ice cream with the two of you”, Vlad explained. Bruno was made to be content by Vlad’s explanation.

The three eventually finished up their food in the cafeteria, alongside their classmates. Bruno kept listening on his MP3 player some songs people probably don’t even know. Alex left for the bathroom soon after they finished eating, and Vlad went off to talk to his dearest friends, Team Toxic. Bruno didn’t mind being lonely, probably because he’s an introvert, at least more of an introvert than an extrovert.

At some point during the lunch period, Vlad approached Bruno quietly and tapped on his shoulder. “Hey Bruno”, Vlad called out. Bruno plugged his MP3 player out of his ears and took a look at Vlad. “Yeah?”, Bruno asked. “You said that you wanted to join Team Toxic, right?”, Vlad asked. Bruno looked around the lunch room with his pupils. “I guess…”, Bruno chuckled awkwardly. Vlad chuckled alongside Bruno, turning himself towards Bruno. “Then you will be!”, Vlad said. Bruno gasped in utter shock. He was in so much shock that he didn’t even mind to say a word. “I’ll tell Mercury that you want to join, and maybe he’ll compromise his ways… so you can join!”, Vlad said. Bruno’s eyes gleamed of joy. “Thank you, Vlad!”, Bruno thanked, hugging Vlad right in the hips. Vlad chuckled, but not in a funny way; more of so in a malicious way… “You’re welcome… Bruno…”, Vlad whispered back, then bearing a devious grin on his face. However, Bruno didn’t notice Vlad’s body language at all, only focusing on his future as a Team Toxic member.

Bruno then paused for a moment, repelled himself away from Vlad and looked confusingly at him. “What do I have to do as a Team

Toxic member?", Bruno inquired. Vlad laughed more. "You don't have to do anything! Other than being an utter douchebag, of course. Toxic is in our name! Maybe even blood", Vlad explained. Bruno smiled. "Oh, ok!", he responded. "You think you're a bad boy, right?", Vlad asked, approaching Bruno steadily. Bruno gulped. "Yeah! I'm bad to the bone! Totally!", Bruno answered with confidence. "That's my Bruno!", Vlad responded. Bruno gulped even more, even chuckling a bit. *"Glad he doesn't know I was a star student!"*, Bruno thought to himself. Vlad walked away from Bruno, nearly not saying a word. He only said, "Good luck, Bruno". It was vague, what Vlad meant. Nonetheless, Bruno was still excited to be a brand-new member of this team.

Vlad approached him again. "By the way, Bruno, did you know it's someone's birthday today?", Vlad asked. Bruno tried to put his mind together, but couldn't. "No—but tomorrow' s mine!", Bruno answered. Vlad chuckled. "It's my birthday—wait, what?", Vlad announced, soon being shocked. "It's… It's your birthday tomorrow?", Vlad stammered. Bruno gasped. "WE SHARE BIRTHDAYS!", Bruno yelled, pulling Vlad's neck towards Bruno's head. "I knew we could be great friends!", Bruno said. Vlad pulled himself away from Bruno. "Well, sharing birthdays **is** a sign of a good friendship…", Vlad responded. "If it's your birthday tomorrow, then I HAVE to tell Mercury that you HAVE to join!", Vlad added. Bruno jumped up and down while Vlad walked away and approached Team Toxic's table.

Alex soon approached Bruno, seemingly having seen what just happened. "Ahem. What was all that about?", Alex asked. Bruno gulped, sweating as he turned his way to Alex's. "Well, it's nothing…", Bruno lied. Alex slammed his fists into the table. "I know it's something! You joined Team Toxic, didn't you?", Alex asked.

Bruno gasped quickly. "What? No! Vlad told me that he'll ask Mercury—I doubt the leader will even accept me!", Bruno denied. Alex inhaled then exhaled slowly. "Alex, calm down", he said to

himself. “I don’t get to choose Bruno’s friends… He gets to!”. Alex went in circles, physically and mentally.

“Glad you finally realized that”, Bruno second-handedly said in the background. Alex instantly turned to Bruno and sighed. “Look, I’m sorry. I just… don’t want you to go through the same things I did, but hey. Maybe the team changed. Who knows? Class 2 did change themselves, why not an 8-person team?”, Alex asked to himself, chuckling a bit. Bruno stared at Alex creepily. “You’re going crazy, aren’t you?”, Bruno asked. “Yes”, Alex chuckled. Bruno chuckled alongside Alex. “Just promise me you won’t get influenced by them, ok?”, Alex asked. Bruno laughed. “Alex! I won’t. Trust me. Stop getting so worked out too! There’s a chance I might not get accepted in, you know?”, Bruno asked. Alex sighed, then looked around the room. “I guess…”, he answered.

Chapter 2
Birthday Boy

In the next day, Bruno slid from his bed and jumped right into clothes. He ate his toaster quickly, then brushed his teeth in sync with the music booming out of the TV. He looked at himself in the mirror as he brushed his hair, trying his best to make it as smooth as possible. Bruno saw his mom packing his backpack with lunches and books. Bruno wore the bag right after she finishing packed. Before Bruno could open the door for himself and his brother, his mother came. “Ah, ah, ah!”, she teased. She took out an apple and slip it into Bruno’s mouth. “Don’t forget your nutrients!”, she chuckled. Bruno laughed alongside her. Mrs. Ray gave Bruno a sweet kiss on the cheek. “Happy birthday”, she congratulated. “Have a great day!”, Mr. Ray wished in the distance.

Bruno walked towards the now gleeful bus with his equally gleeful brother. “Bye!”, he said. “Gee, you’re more energetic than usual today”, Piper snickered. “It should be obvious why—it’s my birthday!”, Bruno replied. The bus driver grinned at Bruno. “Happy birthday, Bruno!”, the driver congratulated. “Thank you!”, Bruno replied. Bruno danced and spun around the bus and reached his seat. He was giggling as he sat. “I’ve heard it’s your birthday, Bruno, so… Happy birthday!”, Blossom congratulated. “Thanks, Blossom!”, Bruno replied, giving her a sudden hug.

“Did you know that it was Vlad’s birthday yesterday?”, Blossom asked. Bruno blinked, then said “Yep. He told me yesterday. He said that we’re sharing birthdays”. Blossom squealed, “Isn’t that exciting?!”. Bruno started hopping on his chair. “Of course!”, he said.

He suddenly begun to listen to music on his MP3 player. Blossom sighed soon after.

"He doesn't feel the same way for me, does he?", Blossom thought to herself. She looked at herself, frowning unlike before. She peeked at Bruno's MP3 player and saw that he was playing one of those Jennifer Lopez songs. *"Am I the only one noticing that Bruno loves female singers?"*, Blossom asked herself. Blossom led out a deep sigh afterward, ignoring what she just saw. *"I wonder if…. We'll be good friends if he joins the team… maybe Aster would take a liking to him too"*, Blossom thought to herself, chuckling a bit even. She looked at the window the same way Bruno does, then she looks at Bruno just like the day before. *"People say he's not that special… but… I don't think so. He's much more… extraordinary"*, Blossom thought to herself.

Finally, everyone got out of the bus. Everyone seemed drowsy and gloomy, except for Bruno. He kept on hopping along the path to the front door of the school. He danced with his backpack, suddenly bumping into Blossom and Aster. "Oops! Sorry!", Bruno apologized with a smile. "Oh, Aster and Blossom!", he said. Blossom and Aster both raised eyebrows at Bruno.

"Sorry for not recognizing you guys—I was just so excited for my birthday!", Bruno cheered. "How nice. Happy birthday", Aster congratulated… but with a passive-aggressive tone. "So, I've heard that you'll be a new member. Looks like Blossom was right", Aster said. "Yup!", Bruno answered. Bruno started to squeak and giggle, then paused it all of a sudden. "Huh. I don't know why, but… I feel like I've known you two before", Bruno said. Bruno stared at Aster and Blossom. "Oh! You're A and Z", Bruno smiled. Aster and Blossom stared at Bruno blankly, only blinking. "No… I must be mistaken, right? Eh", Bruno shrugged as he walked away. Blossom and Aster stared at each other in confusion and shock. The two started following Bruno.

“Hey! You need to explain what just happened”, Aster demanded. Bruno chuckled. “Why should I when you already know why?”, Bruno asked. “Wh-what do you mean?”, Blossom asked. The three were climbing the stairs, only in silence. When they reached the floor, Bruno paused in front of the two. “I thought you two would already know the existence of that book I’m writing”, Bruno said. “What book? The book we’re in right now?”, Aster asked. Bruno nodded. Blossom giggled. “Don’t be silly! Just because we’re in a book doesn’t mean-an-mean-mean-mean……

[redacted]

When Bruno entered his beloved classroom, he jumped right into the seat beside Alex. Everyone waved at Bruno and some even blew their party favors. “Happy Birthday Bruno!!”, everyone cheered. Bruno laughed. “Thank you, everyone!”, he responded. Alex smiled wide at Bruno, but not saying anything. Bruno sat down right into his seat. Mrs. Garcia came into the classroom soon after.

“Good morning, class! And happy birthday, Bruno”, Mrs. Garcia congratulated the same way as everyone else. Vlad cleared his throat right after she said that to Bruno. “It was my birthday yesterday”, Vlad said. “Is that so? Well! Happy late birthday then! Hmph. It’s not really common seeing two kids sharing birthdays, but here we are now!”, Mrs. Garcia chuckled. Vlad rolled his dead eyes away from the lady. Paul tried to hold himself from snickering, which isn’t normal for Paul, a Class 4 student… well, a former one.

Bruno looked into his book, but Alex took it away. “Hey, Bruno”, Alex said. Bruno stared blankly at Alex. “Yeah?”, Bruno asked. Alex sighed deeply afterward. “Sorry, Bruno”, Alex apologized. “For what?”, Bruno asked. “For what I said yesterday—you know, during lunch?”, Alex asked. Bruno laughed hysterically once he heard that. “Alex! You already apologized yesterday, and I accepted it

yesterday!", Bruno said. Right after, he admitted, "I heard everything you whispered to yourself too". Alex's eyes were brought to be wide open, then turning confused. "You have? You must have good hearing skills", Alex said. Bruno giggled. "No. You're just loud when you were talking!", he said. Alex dropped his jaw, metaphorically in the ground.

"Look, Bruno. I must admit: I'm never really good at keeping things to myself!", Alex said. Bruno chuckled awkwardly, maybe even scratching his hair. "Don't worry! I'm the same. It's really getting ridiculous for me", Bruno assured. Alex smiled. He looked like he wanted to give Bruno a hug, but he didn't. Bruno didn't expect a hug or any physical contact coming from Alex, other than maybe a simple handshake or hand gesture, so this is nothing new to Bruno. Regardless, Bruno still wanted to be closer to Alex on the inside, at least that's what it seems to Alex. Alex felt the same in his heart. He never thought to tell Bruno though.

Soon enough, Vlad approached Bruno, who seemed to be passive-aggressive coming from his appearance. "Hey birthday boy", Vlad sung. Bruno looked at Vlad, who was right beside him. Vlad was towering over Bruno though. "Oh, hey Vlad!", Bruno smiled. "Happy late birthday", he added. Vlad paused, then cleared his throat. "No, no, no, happy birthday to **you**! You're one day late for me", Vlad said as he took back. Bruno got flustered after Vlad said that, looking around the classroom, but not behind Vlad.

"Gee! Thanks Vlad. I just… want to congratulate you, because nobody else except your friends did", Bruno said. Vlad paused and blinked again. He started to pour out sweat from his body. "How did you know!?", Vlad exclaimed. Bruno stuck his tongue out and looked right into Vlad's eyes. "Because nobody even knew it was your birthday yesterday", Bruno explained. Vlad shivered like it's a frozen day, then shook it away. "Stop embarrassing me…", Vlad sighed. Vlad looked away from Bruno, as much as he could.

“You know, if you want to, we can just share birthdays today. You don’t look so happy as of now!”, Bruno offered. Vlad pretended to ignore Bruno by walking away, without saying a word. “I know how you feel Vlad~”, Bruno sung. “Yeah, Zach”, Alex suddenly added, looking at the avoiding Vlad. Vlad instantly paused, then ran back to the duo. “HOW DID YOU KNOW MY REAL NAME!?”, Vlad yelled. “We knew each other for years, Vlad. Plus, you used to call yourself Zach before”, Alex explained. Vlad growled. Bruno blinked and made out a baby-doll eye look. He couldn’t stop blinking and seeming affectionate towards Vlad. Adding onto his appearance, Bruno would look adorable to anyone!

“Agh! Fine, Bruno! We can share birthdays!”, Vlad hesitantly agreed. Bruno squeaked in excitement, even dancing around in a circle. “We’re birthday pals!”, Bruno said. Vlad sighed. “You sure have a lot more energy than usual…”, he said.

The other students glared at Bruno and Vlad, who were just having a draining conversation. Some even glared at them, while the others weren’t even going to give two hoots about Vlad. The students would prefer not even mentioning Vlad’s name the same way another student did.

Chapter 3
Dance Number

It was 11:30 and music class. The students were getting their instruments cleaned and ready. Mr. Quaver, just like his students, was getting prepped, through his papers and his clothes. Being clean and fancy is a part of being a musician after all! Louise wasn't though. He wasn't even patient enough to clean his own instruments, which is a sign that he was feeling grouchy for most of the day. Nonetheless, the lesson will still move on.

The girls were wearing glittery costumes and gowns for some reason. Bruno watched them as they spin and dance around the room. He didn't care much—he thought this was normal from some spoiled girls.

Casper approached Bruno, though sliding himself towards Bruno to do so. Sitting down, Casper glanced at Bruno for a moment, then downwards the next second. "Hey, Bruno", Casper greeted. Bruno looked at Casper. "Oh, hey Casper! Haven't talked with you a lot", Bruno chuckled. Casper nodded, tilting his head up next to Bruno's chin.

"I must admit: I'm not good with new people… You're one of them. Well, everyone was a new person to me when I came to this school", Casper said. Bruno looked downwards, after seeing Casper's face. "What do you mean?", Bruno asked. Casper got himself up straight. Bruno followed. "I'm not from New York… or America for that matter!", Casper said. "Where are you from, then?", Bruno asked.

Casper sighed with a comforting smile. "Greenland…", Casper answered. Bruno's hair straightened up. "Really!? So-so, you can speak Danish!?", Bruno exclaimed. Casper smiled, then led out a

straight face. “Er, no”, he answered. Bruno frowned soon after. “Aww”, Bruno said. “Well, would you like to go back someday? I mean, it does look like you enjoy it here, especially with Connor!”, Bruno said. Casper smiled. “Trust me, I am. Though if I have to be honest, it won’t be any worse if I move back”, Casper answered. Bruno smiled warmly.

Connor approached Casper and Bruno, but only turned to Casper. “Hey Casper, want to play the piano?”, Connor asked. Casper nodded, getting up with the stairs that was sitting on with Bruno. His white shirt, covered in the mucus that Casper frequently produced, flopped around in the breeze of the AC. Connor and Casper walked away from the silent Bruno, who started to get up at that point.

With the noisiness in the background, Paul approached Bruno, but still standing up instead of sitting down unlike Casper. “Bruno, would you mind helping me in playing the guitar?”, Paul asked. “Oh. You can’t because of that injury from sparring class, right?”, Bruno asked. Paul reluctantly nodded. “Alright!”, Bruno agreed. Bruno got up and supported Paul when he almost fell on his feet when walking towards the guitar corner.

Meanwhile, the girls begin to conjure up something odd backstage. They were all giggling and laughing, some even snorting. It definitely wasn’t Sarah nor Carly who did so though. Roselynn began twirling around, reaching Winnie’s arm which supported her on the head. Roselynn’s soft and silky hair reached Winnie’s arms and amused her. Mr. Quaver covered up the curtains and approached the girls.

He clapped once he said, “Alrighty girls! I know you all are excited for this”. Mandy raised an eyebrow at Mr. Quaver, who was being proceeded by Louise. “What are we getting ready for anyways?”, Mandy asked while strangely wearing her black, frilly skirt with the other girls who were wearing pastel and bright ones. “Yeah, I sort of have the same question…”, Winnie added. “Me too!”,

Violet added. Mr. Quaver hysterically chuckled, with a bit of a squeak mixed in with the chuckling. He didn't even open up his mouth. Louise was also following, though a lot louder. "All of you may know that it's Bruno's birthday today—so I thought "Hey, Mr. Quaver, since it's Bruno's birthday, why can't I make up something cool for him?". Boom! I came up with this amazing idea", Mr. Quaver explained. The girls stared at him. "And what is this idea?", Violet asked. Mr. Quaver spun around, with Louise turning on some 80s-styled music in the background. "Let's dance for Bruno!", Mr. Quaver declared. Everyone was frozen and still stared at the teacher. "Dance to what exactly?", Winnie asked.

Mr. Quaver froze, just like his students. "Erk. I don't know", Mr. Quaver answered in defeat. He chuckled soon after. "Erm. Do any of you know what sort of music does he like?", Mr. Quaver asked with an embarrassing face. In the background, Louise facepalmed, shutting down the music. Oddly enough, Louise didn't even whisper out a word… well… just say a word. Louise isn't even capable of whispering.

Nadia raised her arm in a swift manner. "I know!", Nadia said. She raised her arm down once Mr. Quaver nodded, making a gesture to lower her arm. "Bruno loves Taylor Swift! He'd always sing out… heh. Well, you know what song, girls!", Nadia chuckled. The girls held their breath and begun singing, "We are never ever ever getting back together!". The girls all laughed in unity. "It's always hilarious when he sings that song!", Carly laughed. "Yep! A boy liking a song like that!", Sarah added with her signature laugh. Mr. Quaver seemed to have a bomb ticked off in his brain. He kept tapping his toes around until he had enough.

"Girls! Shush it! This is meant to be top secret. Not only that, but, well, anyone can like any type of music!", Mr. Quaver said. "Have I ever told you that I like heavy metal?", he followed up. The girls gasped and just stared at Mr. Quaver, all seemingly demented. "You, a classical music guy… LIKES HEAVY METAL!?", Bella yelled. Louise

stomped hard. “SHUT UP!”, Louise yelled. “You shut up, Louise!”, Mr. Quaver countered. Louise zip his mouth instantly after.

“Look, can we just… begin the performance already?”, Mr. Quaver asked. “Before any of you ask: You’ll performance that Taylor Swift song you all just sung in harmony. Sing it the same way”, he commanded. The girls all gulped, except for Carly and Sarah who prepped themselves up. “Get to our level, girls”, Carly laughed. Mandy scoffed at Carly, but didn’t say a word to her.

Marlyn spun around with Jasmine. The two suddenly came from the curtains. It is expected that they came later than the other girls since they seemed so… decorated. So decorated that the two were metaphorically—or physically—shining. “Hello everyone! Did everyone perform yet?”, Jasmine asked. “Don’t say you did! I want to be the lead singer!”, Marlyn begged. The girls all giggled. “Don’t worry! We didn’t even start yet”, Nadia said. “Mr. Quaver said that we’ll perform “We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together” for Bruno”, Roselynn said. “Thank goodness you’re the lead singer for that!”, Winnie laughed following what Roselynn said. Marlyn smiled. “That song will be easy-peasy for me!”, Marlyn said. Jasmine nodded, but was also blushing and turning a fiery red.

“Get READY!”, Louise said. The girls were sweating. Carly and Sarah got out of the curtains first, followed by Mandy, then the others. The country music began to play. Mr. Quaver, who was behind and on the left side of them, silently encouraged them to dance and sing. Marlyn started.

“I remember when we broke up the first time”
“Saying, “This is it, I’ve had enough”
“’Cause like we hadn’t seen each other in a month”
“When you said you needed space”
“What?”, Jasmine added.
Jasmine followed.

“Then you come around again and say”
“"Baby, I miss you and I swear I'm gonna change, trust me"”
“Remember how that lasted for a day?”
“I say, "I hate you," we break up, you call me, "I love you"”
All the girls began singing “Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh”
“We called it off again last night, but”, Marlyn sang.
“This time, I'm telling you, I'm telling you”, Marlyn and Jasmine both sang in harmony, later followed by everyone.
All the girls begun singing,
“We are never, ever, ever getting back together!
We are never, ever, ever getting back together!
You go talk to your friends, talk to my friends, talk to me.
But we are never, ever, ever, ever getting back together!”

Meanwhile, all the boys were dancing and some were even singing along. Bruno was left to be silent, trying his best to resist the urge to do the same thing the boys did. When the girls continued singing into the next part of the song where the chorus was sung again, all the boys jumped onto the stage and danced with the girls. Even Alex joined in. Bruno was hesitant to join in, but then Alex pulled him into the stage.

“Come on, Bruno! It’s your birthday! We won’t judge you!”, Alex encouraged. Bruno smiled and began to dance with everyone, then sang along with Marlyn in the bridge of the song.

It was a surprise that Mr. Gregory didn’t barge into the room—or else Bruno’s birthday would be ruined!

In the proceeding period—the Math period, Bruno was the last one to reach back to class after leaving from the music room. This was because everyone was giving Bruno birthday wishes. Bruno couldn’t care less about the wishes though. All he could wish for was a peaceful and joyful birthday. In that timespan, the students dimmed out the

lights and prepared something in the darkness. Tables were being flashed about the room until Bruno came.

"Guys? What happened?", Bruno asked. He looked around, turned on the lights, then everyone jumped out of their tables—or under the cake's table in Winnie's case—and surprised out Bruno while confetti were flying out of some of the student's confetti cannons. "Happy birthday!", everyone congratulated. Bruno gasped, then laughed. "You all already wished me!", Bruno said. Alex chuckled as he approached Bruno, plucking in his party hat afterward. "We know, but we want to make things even grander!", Alex said.

"I bought the cake… well… my mom did", Carly hesitantly said. Bruno started tearing up. Before he could even wipe them away, Alex held Bruno's shoulder. "Crying, huh?", Alex asked. Bruno chuckled, wiping his tears away. "Sorry. I was just… feeling emotional…", Bruno excused.

Mr. Albert ran into the room and saw everything. He gasped out loud. "What's going on here!?", Mr. Albert exclaimed. Bruno began to tear up again and started looking at Mr. Albert. Meanwhile, the students were awkwardly staring at Mr. Albert. "Sorry, we just wanted to surprise Bruno on his birthday!", Renard apologized with his tongue sticking out.

Mr. Albert began to snicker. "You mean… It's Bruno's birthday today?", Mr. Albert asked. He took a look at the tear-filled boy. "Well, happy birthday!", Mr. Albert congratulated. "Of course, keep this on the low, especially when the officials are around", Mr. Albert whispered while closing the class door, almost locking it.

Bruno hugged Mr. Albert on the waist and started crying out loud. "What's the problem!?", Mr. Albert exclaimed. "It's your birthday, right?". Bruno backed himself apart from the teacher and turned to look down at the ground. He wiped his tears as he was saying,

"Sorry… I just… I…". Bruno started to stutter out nonsense until he could spell out something coherent. "I never felt this special", Bruno smiled with tears on his face as he was looking at his warm classmates. "I've always been called an ordinary kid and… never mind", Bruno brushed off.

Bruno shook himself, metaphorically his worries, away and approached the cake. "Now let's eat this heckin' cake before anyone breaks into class!", Bruno encouraged. Everyone stared at him and blinked. Bruno sighed deeply. "Acting out of character, right?", Bruno asked. Everyone paused, then started laughing in unison.

A pseudo-party played out, but only for a quarter of the lesson. For the rest of it, they studied Math. Apparently, Bruno had begun to develop feelings on Jasmine after she sang like a siren while singing the "happy birthday" rhythm with Connor. The two are incredible singers, which isn't a surprise that one of the singer's singings lured in someone… like a siren. Of course, Bruno never told anyone of his feelings except for his sole confidant, Alex. However, Vlad does suspect that Bruno has a crush on Jasmine, even long before he actually developed a crush on her.

Chapter 4
Sink or Swim

After the lunch period was the Swimming lesson—or period. Everyone got to the changing rooms, changing into their swimming suits. Well, most did. Some didn't for a reason or another. The students eager enough to swim for that day lined up beside the edge of the pool. They were apparently waiting patiently for Mr. Duke—impatient for some students. One of those students is the infamously impatient Carly.

Everyone was only trying their best to whisper, but failing badly. Truly badly. All they could talk about are silly topics. Silly compared to the typical things older people talk about. It's expected from teenagers like the students.

Oddly enough, the swimming coach's son wasn't present. Who was the son of the coach? It was no other than… Alex.

Alex stepped his foot out of the door that crashed straight into the wall. Alex was dressed in his clothing that looked different than the others. While everyone who wore swimsuits wore the typical ones, Alex wore only shorts. This wasn't out of the ordinary for him, since he never really wore a swimsuit ever since Swimming lessons began to play out for these students in Grade 6.

Alex got out with a blonde man that looked identical to him. Short, blonde-haired and even to the vest that they usually wear everyday to school. Alex was groaning and moaning on his way out of the door, which was coming from the main corridor of Floor 3.

"Dad! I don't want to wear… whatever is that!", Alex yelled as he pointed at a silly swimsuit his father held up. The swimsuit was black with yellow stripes and a peculiar bubbly pattern across it. "So what?

That's better than wearing shorts", the man scoffed. He looked at Alex, pausing his walk. "Besides, you have to be a great example for me!", he added. Alex grunted after, but not seemingly saying a word. At that point, every student stared at the two. Alex was embarrassed by the attention while his father looked back at the students and waved at them, saying, "Oh, students! Excuse me for a moment!".

Everyone raised their eyebrows at the two. The man clapped, yet not approaching us. "Students! Please get to work! I'll have to have a talk with your fellow classmate here", the man explained. "Okay, Mr. Duke!", everyone saluted in unison. They did what they were told to do: work as usual. Bruno didn't though. Bruno was one of the few students who weren't eager to swim that day, most probably because it was his birthday. "Hey, Bruno! Happy birthday to you!", Mr. Duke congratulated in the mere background. Bruno looked at Mr. Duke, then waved back and smiled, not even saying a word. Bruno walked towards a seat.

Alex growled and took the swimsuit away from his father's reach. He stepped on it, on each of the sleeves of the limbs. One by one. Mr. Duke obviously took notice of this and gasped. He took it once Alex reached the right leg. Mr. Duke grunted afterward. "Son! Don't do this!", Mr. Duke yelled. Alex stomped right onto the white-tiled ground. "Why shouldn't I, dad!? You put my mental health in jeopardy! Not only mine, but August's too!", Alex yelled back.

Mr. Duke turned pure red in pure rage. "What do you mean by that!?", he yelled. Alex groaned soon after, shaking his hair over and over again. "Ever since you met that… girl… You've been ignoring me and August! Not only that, but you kept on talking about the girl's daughters!", Alex explained. "Dad, you already know I don't want sisters! August is already enough work for me. You barely even care for him".

Mr. Duke blew his shabby hair away from his eyesight and folded his arms. “It’s none of your business”, Mr. Duke said while doing so. “It totally is, dad! You should at least let your eldest child get involved in this! I mean, I could get a new mom for Pete’s sake!”, Alex yelled. He was trying his best to restrain himself as much as possible.

Meanwhile, the other students were just watching the two have a verbal war against each other. Some were concerned, while others were enjoying the drama. Bruno was the former. He was concerned for his dearest friend. Alex was arguing with his own father in front of the entire class, which he isn’t even aware are watching him. Bruno himself could never imagine getting into an argument with his father, yet he could still feel some level of sympathy for his newest pal.

While the two continue their arguing, after many thinking it’d be over, Bruno noticed a subtle whisper right beside his seat. Bruno looked all around the seat just to find nothing, only to find the cause of it far into the bathroom door. The gray-metal door was opened by some familiar faces. Some faces that Bruno knew for 8-years. Indeed, the ones who opened it were Bruno’s former pals. It was appropriate since Bruno was just witnessing his newest friend arguing with his own father.

Bruno glanced around the room in confusion once he found them—specifically Elias and Tony—behind the door. “Bruno, come on”, Tony whispered. Bruno sighed, took one last glance at everyone, then pretended to ignore his friends. Elias drooped his face down (metaphorically of course) and ran like the speed of sound. Once he reached Bruno, he gripped him by the waist and took Bruno to the bathroom, shutting the door for once.

“Bruno, you idiot! Why didn’t you come in!?”, Elias yelled impulsively. Everyone glared at Elias, including Bruno himself. Elias, of course, was incredibly embarrassed and chuckling awkwardly. “Well, Bruno,

you're finally here", Minimus said. Bruno looked around the bathroom. He mostly saw the circle that was formed among him and his friends. It was formed in the middle of the bathroom, in between the two halves of the six toilet doors and the four sinks.

"Thanks for bringing me here but… Why are we together again, exactly?", Bruno asked. Maximus started hysterically giggling. "We're not getting together, silly! I mean, we are—but we're here to have a talk!", Maximus said. Bruno raised his eyebrows. "A… talk?", Bruno asked. "Yeah. A serious one", Pacha responded. Evans moved himself closer to Bruno's position. "Look, Bruno. We're just…", Evans stopped. "Sorry", everyone apologized in unison.

Bruno kept looking around the room with his own pupils. "What do you mean? What's going on?!", Bruno asked. Evans sighed then touched one of Bruno's shoulders. "Bruno, we didn't mean to hurt your feelings when we said we'd break up", Evans said. Bruno started tearing up. "You didn't have to apologize", Bruno assured, wiping the tears away. "Why? We hurt your feelings. Doesn't that mean we have to apologize to you?", Minimus asked. Bruno snickered afterward. "Not really! For me at least", Bruno responded. He wiped all his tears away, then said "I knew this'd happen. It's inevitable". Everyone looked at each other while frowning.

"Well, we know it's your birthday today, obviously", Pacha chuckled. Elias held his arms together into the ground and looked down at it, then at Bruno. "We want to make things right again!", Elias smiled. "We want to reform the team!", Maximus announced. Bruno silently blinked, then put himself together and just thought about how that'd work out. Things changed so much between him and his group, that even he, a boy who is usually stagnant, changed even a bit.

Bruno sighed once he realized the truth.

"Bruno, you're being silly here, aren't you? You wanted to be with them in the first day! Then in your birthday you changed your mind? Tsk. You're going crazy…"

“Or… am I not?”

, Bruno kept on thinking.

Bruno’s heart couldn’t take the hesitation any longer. He had to admit the truth eventually, so why not at the moment? “Bruno?”, Tony asked. Bruno’s friends noticed his odd behavior, such as his pupils freely moving across his eyes and his excessive sweating. Bruno inhaled and exhaled. He suddenly thought of a way to word it.

Bruno gripped Evans on his shoulder and started to finally say something. “Look, I just… I’m just feeling exhausted. You know, we are never getting back together”, Bruno said. Bruno chuckled then winked. “Like ever”, he added. His friends froze, then sighed. “You’re quoting your favorite song again, huh?”, Evans sighed. Bruno laughed soon after, then suddenly paused. “But seriously: We’re not getting back together”, Bruno said. Everyone paused.

“Wait… You’re… Actually not wanting to join the reformed group?”, Evans asked. Bruno nodded with a deep frown. “Yeah. I hate to admit it, but… I changed as much as you guys on the first day. I’m sorry, but it’s true”, Bruno said. Everyone smiled. “It’s fine. At least you’re being honest about it, Bruno”, Pacha said. Everyone nodded together and hugged him. “Either way, happy birthday!”, Elias congratulated. Bruno smiled wide and laughed.

“Well, if that’s the case…”, Evans said as everyone pushed themselves away from Bruno and back to their positions. “The group won’t be reformed!”, Evans said. Bruno gasped. His eyes turned baggy and worried. “No! You can form without me”, Bruno said. Everyone gathered beside Bruno and smiled. “Nah. The group is much better with you in it!”, Maximus said. Bruno seemed to be amused by the sounds of that.

“Really?”, Bruno asked, nearly chuckling. “Of course”, Evans said. Bruno stared at them, then smiled. He held back tears, of course and looked down at the ground while blushing in red.

Pacha soon glared at Bruno. “Why did you change your mind anyways?”, Pacha asked. Bruno giggled a bit. “I just joined Team Toxic—recently actually”, Bruno said. Everyone gasped. “You joined… TEAM TOXIC!? **THE** TEAM TOXIC?!”, Minimus yelled. Bruno shut Minimus’ mouth right after he stopped saying that. Bruno groaned, saying “Look, I just want to get to know the members better. Plus, Vlad sort of forced me to join it”. His friends stared for a moment, then led out an “ohhhh” together. Bruno held his chest together, almost having a smirk on his face.

“Erm. Bruno, I think you should get back to class”, Tony suggested. “Eugh! And we have to get to ours! This bathroom is smelly as heck!”, Elias exclaimed, then flinched just by the scent of the bathroom. It’s a surprise how nobody even commented on that.

The whole team left the bathroom. Bruno was the only member who wasn’t sneaking their way back to class. Bruno sighed once he saw his old friends leave. *“Maybe it’s better if I stay with them… Who knows what Team Toxic would do to me?”*, Bruno thought to himself. He shook his head to clear those thoughts.

He approached the edge of the pool and saw a reflection of himself in the clear, blue water. Bruno thought, *“No! I know the members will like me! I mean, Vlad is already a member and it doesn’t look like the leader hates me. Especially from what happened between… oh…”*.

Bruno had a hardy gulp once he realized something. *“… Aster and Blossom! They’ll cause a lot of trouble for me!”*, he worried. He inhaled and exhaled. Once he saw his reflection, he took out his arm and slid it through the water, trying to get rid of his own reflection. *“What have I done? Maybe Alex was right…”*, Bruno thought to himself.

Suddenly, the reflection was of Bruno having the Team Toxic members behind him. They didn’t look mean or evil, they seemed kind and soft in the reflection. As soon as Bruno saw it, he turned his

head back only to see Connor and Casper approaching him instead. Bruno took a deep breath.

"Hi Bruno! Is anything the matter?", Casper asked once he sat down on the edge of the pool, to the right side of Bruno. Connor sat on the right of Casper. Bruno blushed. "Not really. I was just thinking of things", Bruno said. Casper chuckled. "We're thinking of things too!", Casper said. "Lots of things", Connor added. Bruno turned his head to the two in curiosity. "Like what?", Bruno asked. "Like what we talked about back in Music class", Casper said. "And about… swimming", Connor added. Casper sneezed right after Connor said that.

"You see, I always seem to sneeze, especially when I'm near water, but Mr. Duke always wants me to swim. How do I tell him that I'm just not good near water?", Casper admitted. Bruno wore a soft smile towards Casper and gravitated towards him, nearly pushing him away from the pool right after. "Why can't we **just** tell Mr. Duke about it? It's pretty simple and it looks like he's done with his arguing", Bruno suggested. Connor stuttered and fiddled himself around. "Th-that's what I told him! But then Casper said he couldn't do it…", he stammered. Bruno blinked with a silent grin, almost looking like he wanted to make out a tongue-in-cheek expression.

"I'll tell him. I know how shy the both of you are!", Bruno declared. Before Casper could say a thing, Bruno pushed himself out of the floor and approached Mr. Duke. While doing so, Connor and Casper got up, keeping some distance between them and the pool. Bruno tapped Mr. Duke in the shoulder. He's about as shy as Casper and Connor, though only to teachers. Mr. Duke is no exception. In fact, it's much more daunting to talk to him since Mr. Duke is Alex's father, and Alex is Bruno's new friend!

Bruno inhaled once Mr. Duke turned his body towards him. Bruno was about to say something until… "Hello Bruno! You're Alex's new friend, huh?", Mr. Duke asked. Bruno grew surprised. He twisted

his head back-to-back then stuttering himself. “Uh. Yeah”, Bruno replied. Mr. Duke squealed for a moment and almost tapped his toes around the wet floor. “My son won’t stop gushing on about you! Well, I think. He’s so smart! Don’t you know?”, Mr. Duke flattered around. Bruno kept blinking, then asked “Weren’t you just arguing with him?”. Mr. Duke gulped, soon bringing an obviously fake smile while sweating. He was looking around the wet blue room. “Right. Well, what brings you here?”, Mr. Duke brushed off.

“Casper said that he can’t really swim because he’s not good near water”, Bruno said. Mr. Duke raised his eyebrow. “I beg your pardon? What do you mean by that?”, the teacher asked. Bruno led out a loud gulp. “You see, Casper would always sneeze near water”, Bruno explained, pointing at a sneezing Casper that was sitting beside the water. Casper was as red as a tomato. Mr. Duke frowned deeply, even covering his mouth in shock. “Oh dear! So that’s why he hasn’t been swimming for 3 months?”, Mr. Duke asked. “Why didn’t he and his parents tell me sooner?”, he added to his questions. “Casper is shy, and I think his parents thought that he already told you”, Bruno explained. Mr. Duke put his head together and smiled. “I understand”, Mr. Duke said. Bruno grinned, turning his head towards Casper and Connor who both looked at Bruno. Bruno approached the two, Mr. Duke being occupied with other students and their job of swimming well. He was so focused on it that he forgot to ask Bruno if he’d like to swim for the day.

Casper squeals in excitement as Bruno sat down with the duo, his red cheeks turning into fairly normal ones. “Thank you so much Bruno! I was always given a hard time by Mr. Duke because of this, so thank you!”, Casper excitingly thanked. Bruno grinned wide. “No need to thank me! I’m just being a good classmate, right?”, Bruno asked. Casper nodded. “Hey, Connor. Why don’t you swim?”, Bruno asked. Connor turned to Bruno, leading out a soft, small frown. “I just don’t

want to", Connor answered. "Well, it's my birthday today, so I prefer not to swim today!", Bruno explained.

Bruno looked at the blue pool while saying that. He was stunned by how blue the pool is. He doesn't know if it's blue because of the water or because of the floor of it, but it's probably both reasons! When looking down at the pool, Bruno saw Alex gliding his way through the water. It was odd for him. Alex didn't even have any equipment or any full-on suit. Alex was only bearing simple swimming shorts. Alex was a cheetah through the pool as his classmates would say.

Carly and Sarah, who were both dressed in sparkly swimsuits. Carly's swimsuit had a frilly skirt while Sarah's was just a simple top. They approached Bruno, Casper and Connor in their usual narcissistic ways. Once the three noticed them, Bruno grunted in his mind. Bruno was trying his best to take himself away from the girls. Casper and Connor were talking while Bruno was doing so. Despite those efforts, Carly and Sarah came and laughed at the three. Bruno was instantly maddened by this. "Lookee here! Some silly students who can't swim!", Sarah mocked. Bruno covered the girl's way of seeing the shy boys. "For the record: if I swim, I'll die and Connor and Bruno just don't want to swim today", Casper said. "Wow! Casper the quiet kid finally talks!? Is this the end of the world?!", Carly exaggerated. Casper groaned as he got up. "I'm not a quiet kid! I just don't talk much because I'm, as you guys love to call me, a foreigner. Besides, I don't even know what to say half of the time", Casper responded. The girls ignored Casper's counter though, looking at how Casper had become. He was red both because he was mad and because he was so close to the pool.

"I see that you're feeling red today", Carly taunted. Casper groaned even more, but Connor pulled him down to his original position. "Casper, don't give them more attention. It's their intention to gain attention from angry people", Connor whispered as he advised

Casper. Casper frowned, looking down at the wet floor. “Connor’s right!”, Bruno whispered, adding onto what Connor said. Carly stomped her shoes as she approached the three. “Acting silly now? I know what you’re talking about”, Carly taunted more. “You’re the one acting silly, Carly!”, Bruno yelled back. Carly began laughing and laughing, along with Sarah. “Yeah, right”, Carly replied. Casper kept on sneezing and sneezing—and sneezing! The bullies continued laughing. “I mean, look at him! Always sneezing like there’s no tomorrow!”, Carly added. Casper grunted as he tried to stand up, but slipping on the wet floor, his body flung into the ground. The bullies laughed and laughed. “You can’t even stand up!”, Sarah laughed. Casper got back once again “I can! The floor is just slippery!”, Casper replied back.

The girls walked around Casper, Bruno and Connor in a circle. “Fine, fine, but tell me this: Why would you even try befriending a newbie?”, Carly asked. “Maybe it’s because we were both once newbies? Unlike you two who are just snobbish”, Casper answered back. Carly and Sarah paused their walking in front of Casper and in the middle of Bruno and Connor. “Wow, Casper. I didn’t know you could even talk back. Looks like you’ve recovered from being homesick!”, Carly said. “… Homesick from being in Greenland!”, Sarah added. Casper dropped his jaw and stared at the two. Connor and Bruno were both equally as surprised. “H-How did you know I was from Greenland!?”, Casper yelled. “Ahem. Did you forget that when you first came into this school, you said you were from Greenland? How pathetic! You forgot so quickly”, Carly joked. Casper watched as the girls giggled their tongues out. Casper kept on stuttering out words, which sounded gibberish to anyone. It’s a surprise that nobody noticed what was going on either. The situation seemed like it'd make out a ruckus, but it looks like it didn’t.

“Well, why can’t you just go back then? Or just try to speak Danish”, Carly taunted. Casper slapped Carly right when she tried to

pat him on the shoulder. “I won’t, and I can’t!”, Casper answered. “Fine then. Might as well go back to the water then!”, Carly responded. Casper widened his pupils as Sarah pushed Casper into the pool. Casper fell in grace, yet he was distraught when dipping down. The shallow pool doesn’t make up for Casper’s fear, as he was “allergic” to water. “Casper!”, Connor cried as he got up. Bruno was utterly shocked by what just happened. “Hey! He’d die, you know!”, Bruno yelled at the girls, but they didn’t notice him. He was only in the mere background of what was going on, which might cause a tragedy.

Casper was already submerged in the water. All he could do is think about sinking or swimming. Connor was hesitant to jump into the water for some reason. “… I can’t save him…”, Connor sighed. The girls were already walking away, trying to ignore what they just did. Deep inside, the girls actually regret what they just did, but they never admit that feeling. “Why, Connor?”, Bruno asked. “I can’t swim! Bruno, you have to!”, Connor admitted. “But Connor! I’m not that good when it comes to deep water!”, Bruno replied. Connor started to tear up and fall down. He seemed to have lost his grip.

The students had begun to notice that Casper was down. They were all panicking, some trying to save him, but they were too slow. One exception came in though: Alex. He went swiftly through the water and reached Casper before anyone could. Alex bopped up into the surface and brought Casper into the floor before any tragedy could’ve occurred. Alex gasped for his breath as he came along with Casper into the ground.

“Alex… That was amazing!”, Bruno exclaimed. Bruno was about to give Alex a hug, but Alex pushed Bruno away from him. “Oops! Right! Personal space!”, Bruno chuckled. Alex walked towards Casper, with his father coming across Casper as quickly as he could. “My boy! Thanks for doing my job!”, Mr. Duke said. Alex blew his

stranded hair away from his head when he replied, “No problem. I just want to save a classmate, that’s all”.

Mr. Duke’s eyes moved around the pool. “Who did this!?”, he yelled. Carly and Sarah hid behind a seat, constantly peeping out of it. They were sweating, of course. They nearly ended the life of a classmate for no reason. “It was Carly and Sarah”, Connor replied. “They didn’t even care that Casper was allergic to water!”, he added. “Hey! We didn’t even know!”, Carly yelled. Carly was out of the seat while Connor said that, along with Sarah. “Either way, you should already know that some of your classmates aren’t good swimmers”, Mr. Duke said. He sighed soon after. “We’re sorry!”, Sarah apologized. “Show your apologies to your teacher… and your parents! Especially Mr. Isaac. You too, Carly!”, Mr. Duke scolded. Carly and Sarah gulped, soon running away like road runners.

Bruno and Alex were laughing. Mr. Duke approached his son. “You were amazing there, Alex. I know we’ve had our differences, but—“. Mr. Duke was stopped by Alex hugging Mr. Duke. “Thanks for teaching me how to swim so early”, Alex thanked. Mr. Duke was frozen, being tugged by Alex’s arms. Bruno and Connor smiled in the background while Casper was getting up from being fainted. “What happened?”, Casper asked. “It’s quite a long story”, Alex responded as he got out of his father’s reach. “Come on, I’ll take you to the nurse. I see that your leg had been fairly injured”, Mr. Duke said. Casper walked with Mr. Duke with the help of Connor. “I’ll come”, Connor said. Mr. Duke smiled and nodded. The three got out. “I’m surprised that Carly and Sarah could do such a thing”, Bruno said. Alex shrugged, approaching Bruno. “What else do you expect from bullies in this sort of school?”, Alex asked. Bruno chuckled awkwardly, trying his hardest to forget his former branch, which thankfully wasn’t as weird as his current one.

Chapter 5
Accepted In

Finally, the day ends.

It was during sunset. A beautiful sunset, just for Bruno as a gift. Vlad's too. Everyone was hopping out of their way out of their school. The students were leaving without their parents and buses as it always was since the hangout was established as an official one recognized by the school. On their way out of the gate, students cross paths with the Science teacher, Mr. Adams, who was waving everyone a friendly good-bye.

One of the students was Bruno. Bruno and Vlad were walking with their classmates when they heard, "Hey, birthday boys!". Mr. Adam called the two out apparently. They approached him as their classmates walked by. "Happy birthday, Bruno and Vlad!", Mr. Adams congratulated. Bruno smiled. "Thanks, Mr. Adams!", Bruno said. "Why did you wish so soon?", Vlad asked. "Look, I just forgot to wish during the lesson! I couldn't focus so much on you two, and it was a complete mistake on my part", Mr. Adams explained. Bruno smiled. "It's fine!", Bruno assured.

Vlad made a slight push on Bruno's shoulder and grinned. Bruno smiled and walked away with Vlad. Mr. Adams was left alone, waving goodbye at everyone as the sun goes down. "I can't believe we're already 13", Bruno said while walking away. Vlad nodded, but not saying a word. It's odd but Bruno accepted that anyways.

Bruno, Vlad and their classmates reached the hangout. Vlad walked to the grouped area. Bruno ignored him, instead going to the Class 2 path along with his classmates. He already saw that the class's door

was decorated just for his birthday. This has happened for other birthdays, so Bruno and Vlad definitely weren't exceptions. Of course, Bruno was feeling like he was on top of the world. However, Bruno didn't hear the music playing in the background once he entered the room, since he was playing his own music in his MP3 player. It was tucked into his bag's little side pocket.

Bruno saw all his classmates, planning to watch a movie and having random conversations. This was the usual for the boy. He sat down on his bean bag and stopped listening to his own music once he saw the movie playing on the TV. His classmates were paying attention to it. It was Bruno's favorite movie: How To Train Your Dragon. "Wow! Have you guys really set this up for me?", Bruno asked. "Of course! Violet told me about your love for the movie", Nadia said. "Nadia was really nosy about it…", Violet added with a deep sigh. Bruno giggled. "I bought the DVD since the movie's release. My brother really wanted to watch it!", Jasmine said.

Bruno blinked and stared at Jasmine, who was sitting right beside his bean bag. "You have a brother, huh?", Bruno asked. Jasmine nodded with a smile. "I have a younger and an older one… but the older one… well… it's complicated. My younger brother likes the movie", Jasmine said. "Heh! My brother does too! He's the younger brother", Bruno said. Jasmine was as surprised as Bruno was about her. Jasmine chuckled. "So yours was a little demon like mines?", Jasmine asked. Bruno chuckled back. "Yup!", he answered.

"Shhh. Let us listen!", Renard hushed. Bruno and Jasmine both zipped their mouths, but not before leading out one last snicker from their chins. Max led out a debilitating sigh of relief. "I've never watched such a movie. Actually, the only movies I've ever watched are old classic movies", Max said. "Is that so?", Riley asked. "Well, you're in luck! You're watching your first movie here with your classmates then!", Sheldon smiled wide. Max chuckled, instantly frowning right

after. “How awful of a childhood must you have then?”, Paul asked. Max paused with a silent face.

He wasn’t looking at anyone nor the movie, only at the ground. “I don’t think I even had a childhood…”, Max answered. Everyone frowned at Max with a sad face. The only ones who weren’t upset were Carly, Sarah and Winnie, the latter focused on the movie. “Oooh wee! Look at this!”, Winnie exclaimed, pointing at the scene of the Vikings fighting the dragons. Everyone exclaimed with awe and amusement.

In the midst of it, Bruno was dragged by the shoulder by Vlad. Nobody could’ve pulled him back since Alex was busy with his brother at the time this was occurring. “Psst, Bruno. There’s a Team Toxic meeting, and we need you”, Vlad whispered. Bruno’s eyes widened greatly. “Why?”, Bruno asked. “No need to ask. Just follow me”, Vlad whispered back.

Bruno blinked blankly. Vlad walked away and out of the room, with Bruno soon following him. Nobody noticed that Bruno left, nor noticed that Vlad even came into the room.

The two were passing through the corridor and the halls. Bruno closed his eyes by Vlad’s request. At that point, Bruno was being pulled by the arm through Vlad. Vlad was surprised that none of the two bumped into anyone, probably because everyone was cautious in the grouped hall and there weren’t many people that day.

Bruno’s eyes were filled in black for it was shut during the entire run.

Eventually, the two reached the Team Toxic room. Vlad knocked the door. Bruno only heard the noise of it. He was trying his best to identify what was going on, but he couldn’t do much. The door creaked open, but it didn’t reveal anything in Bruno’s eyes. Vlad saw his friends though. Once he did so, Vlad shook Bruno on the shoulder and said, “Open your eyes”.

Bruno followed that command and opened his eyes. That prompted him to see the immense number of decorations and colors that was in front of him in the very room that he was in. It was more decorated than his class's room! What was more of a surprise were the members jutting out of random spots in the room, and yelling out, "Happy birthday!".

"Aww! What's all this about?", Bruno asked, nearly tearing up. Mercury approached him as the members were standing in place and out of their original hiding spots. "It's your birthday, and since you're our newest member: We might as well make this up for you", Mercury said. Bruno opened his jaw in feeling overjoyed. "You mean… I'm **actually** a member now!?", Bruno exclaimed. Mercury was frozen in place, so were the other members—even Vlad. "Yeah?", Kyanide responded. Bruno squealed and squeaked in excitement. He couldn't even keep his legs still!

While everyone was fine with this, Aster stomped into the ground. Aster was wearing his party hat just like his friends. He looked frustrated though. "Wait! So, Bruno is **really** truly a member now? Like, seriously?", Aster asked. Mercury turned back to see Aster. "Yeah? What's wrong with that?", Mercury asked. Aster turned red. "Tsk, psk—I thought we were celebrating **Vlad's** birthday, not Bruno's! Plus, I'm not accepting this!", Aster said. Mercury rolled his eyes, trying to ignore whatever nonsense Aster is saying. Aster approaching him. "Mercury, stop doing this please! Next time we accept a new member, you should tell us!", Aster said. Blossom coughed a bit in the background. "I did technically tell you this, Asty", Blossom said. "If you call me Asty again…", Aster said with an agitated tone. Blossom giggled.

"Well, how are you accepting this then?", Mercury asked. Aster realized what was going to happen as Mercury stomped harder than

he did. “Uhm… err…”, Aster stuttered, looking around the room. Once he saw Blossom, an idea was hatched.

“Aha! Bruno, I challenge you to a battle!”, Aster declared. Bruno’s eyes widened up. “WHAT?! ANOTHER ONE!?”, Bruno yelled. Aster walked towards Bruno in an intimidating way. “Yup! And with Blossom like last time. If you win, then you get to join the team. If you lose, then you get to give me your lunch money tomorrow”, Aster dared. Bruno stared at Aster with daunted eyes. Bruno gulped deeply and thought about this.

“Fine”, Bruno accepted. Everyone gasped in the background, including Blossom. “Hah! Alright! Let’s get things started!”, Aster grinned. He walked out of the room. Blossom followed him, not even saying a word when she was doing so.

Bruno was left alone and silent. The others were looking at him like he was crazy—which he was. “Are you insane!? You lost to them the last time!”, Laurel yelled. Bruno sighed. “I have to. They’re going to give me a hard time if I don’t”, Bruno said while walking out of the room. The others followed him. “It’s going to be fine if you lose, Bruno. I’m still going to allow you in. It’s your birthday after all, and you do have good enough potential to join!”, Mercury assured. Bruno smiled, turning his head back at Mercury. “Thank you”, he said in appreciation.

“You know. It really wasn’t a mistake leaving in your decorations from last night, Vlad”, Ivon second-handedly said while Bruno walked towards the middle of the grouped hallway. Vlad chuckled. “I guess so”, Vlad said. Laurel giggled. “That cake was amazing too! Sad that we don’t have any for Bruno though”, Laurel said. “That’s because you ate it”, Kyanide said. Laurel giggled even more, but in an awkward way instead of a genuine one.

In the middle of the hallway, Bruno, Aster and Blossom formed a triangle among themselves. The three were staring at each other.

Bruno was determined, Aster was smug, and Blossom was in fear. “Ready… set… battle!”, Mercury declared.

Aster and Blossom charged instantly at Bruno. Bruno charged back. Lightning metaphorically struck outside the window as soon as they did so. Leaping into each other, Aster reached into Bruno first. Blossom fell flat into the ground. Everyone was watching in the background, only in pure amusement.

Bruno kicked right at Aster’s face before Aster could pull a punch at Bruno. Aster bit into Bruno’s cheek. Bruno punched Aster, but Aster dodged it. Bruno sent Aster flying into the air by pushing him high up in the air. Aster fell right into position for a strike though. Aster ran straight into Bruno’s guts, pushing him right onto the wall. Bruno punched Aster, with Aster not dodging it. Bruno kicked Aster into the ground, leaving Aster with a bit of a bruise in his face.

“Hey, Bloss! Come on here!”, Aster yelled. Blossom was standing there like a helpless duck. She gulped, making her way towards Bruno. Blossom jumped into him, but he dodged her. Bruno pulled Blossom by the leg and threw her at Aster’s body once he tried to get up. Blossom got up before Aster did and tried to blow a punch. Surprisingly, Blossom did so without any fail.

“I did it!”, Blossom cheered. Bruno pushed her into the ground though. Aster finally got up and punched Bruno’s leg, letting him trip. Aster then pulled Bruno by the leg, threw him around in a circle in the air, finally throwing him into the air, and into the wall, flying through the audience. Everyone gasped and made way for Aster, who was walking towards Bruno, getting ready to pull punches. However, once Aster was close to Bruno, Bruno pulled Aster and got up, throwing Aster into the ground, in the middle of the hallway. Blossom gasped, backing away from the fight. Aster, afraid, didn’t do anything, only walking himself away from Bruno with his arms. He was seemingly backwards-crawling while Bruno walked towards him.

Bruno jumped right on Aster the same way Aster did to Bruno in the beginning of the battle. Bruno went crazy with Aster. In the end, Aster had been injured, but so was Bruno since Aster fought back. Blossom was left, feeling awkward. “I forfeit!”, Blossom cried. Bruno and Aster were gasping for a great breath of air.

Everyone gasped in unison. “This battle shall end!”, Mercury declared. “What!?”, Aster exclaimed. Blossom coughed. “We have to end this, Aster! Look at you!”, Blossom yelled. Aster kept on twitching himself. Aster got up, so did Bruno. “Wait, so I’m actually joining the team?”, Bruno asked with stars in his eyes. The Team Toxic members approached the three and nodded.

“Yes! Everyone! Bruno is now a member of Team Toxic!”, Mercury announced. Everyone stayed still, looking at Bruno in shock. “And happy birthday!”, Kyanide cheered. Vlad smiled, but not saying a word. Laurel was eating chips in the background. Aster and Blossom were just staring at what was going on, both feeling worried.

Chapter 6
Mystery Books

On Monday, Bruno got ready as usual. He reached the bus right after he finished his waffles and orange juice. His brother followed him, though before Bruno could. It was odd since Bruno was trying his best to be faster than his brother, Piper. As per usual, Bruno would listen to his MP3 player, feeling tired unlike the last two days.

Blossom would look at Bruno's backside. Bruno was leaning forward to view Manhattan, which he usually does in the bus. It was an amazing sight to him. The skyline was filled with buildings and sometimes airplanes. He felt like those airplanes are stars wishing to be wished by him. Bruno looked back only to see Blossom staring at him.

Once he did so, Blossom turned her back on him and just looked down at the floor of the bus. She blushed. Bruno looked far from Blossom just to spot Winnie. "Am I seeing things right?", Bruno asked. "Isn't Winnie supposed to be with her father?", he added. Blossom pulled Bruno away from looking at Winnie. "Congratulations on being a new member!", Blossom suddenly yelled. Bruno blinked, then smiled. "Uh. Thanks", Bruno smiled then chuckled awkwardly.

"I know that you, I and Aster will get along just fine! Oh, the other members too!", Blossom said. Bruno sighed. "I wish", he responded. He looked back outside. Blossom sighed the same way Bruno did.

Suddenly, a familiar face appeared at the side of Blossom's sight. She opened her widened eyes and stared at him. "Look at this! Blossom is with her one and only boyfriend here!", Nathaniel taunted. Bruno

instantly looked back to spot Nathaniel as soon as he heard the mocking voice.

"Hey! Get back to your place!", Blossom yelled back. Nathaniel snickered around. "Yeah, right. I just want to see my old pal, Bruno here!", he responded. Bruno got infuriated by that sentence. He didn't like being called a pal to such a douchebag. No way he wants to even associate with the guy! "We're not old pals, Nathaniel!", Bruno replied. Nathaniel snickered some more. "Ok then. If you don't want to associate with me, then why would you associate yourself with those pickles, Team Toxic?", Nathaniel asked. Bruno froze in place, not coming up with any words to say.

"Leave Bruno alone! He chooses his friends, not you. At least he's not a snobby boy who'd marry an equally snobby girl", Blossom insulted. Nathaniel took immense offense from that insult. He couldn't stand being called a snob! Though he was used to it from Blossom, who'd take a lot of time out of her day just to insult and mock him. "Tsk! The bus is going to stop anyways", Nathaniel brushed off as he walked back to his seat.

Bruno was shell shocked. Before he could say anything, the bus stopped in. It reached the school, thus everyone got out of it.

Bruno and Blossom got out of the bus together, with Bruno looking at Blossom with blooming eyes. "Wow, I can't believe you defended me!", Bruno said. Blossom chuckled. "I just want get you away from that nasty Nathaniel", Blossom said. Bruno had a warm smile on his face.

Once Blossom and Bruno reached Floor 8's doors, Aster approached the two with a quick rush. He was almost losing his breath when doing so. "Ugh. I should've known running from Class 4 to the floor's door is so… far!", Aster complained.

Bruno snickered. “Aren’t you Class 4 people all so strong and athletic?”, Bruno taunted. Aster grunted, saying “We’re not **always** that way”.

The rest of Team Toxic comes by. “Hello, hello, new member!”, Mercury greeted. Bruno smiled when the other members arrived. “Aww! Already building a relationship, I see!”, Laurel swooned. Aster rolled his eyes and made a disgusted whine while Blossom grinned with shining teeth.

“Come on, Aster! Lighten up! Things will be fun with a third member between the two of us!”, Blossom encouraged, patting him on the back while he was slouched down. Aster bended back up, rolling his eyes again. “Blossom, you already know what happened the last time we had a third member… and before that…”, Aster replied, almost sounding like a whisper, possibly to hide something from Bruno and maybe even the other members.

“Well, if you have any questions about the team, Bruno, you can just ask me during class or ask Mercury if we’re out of class, ok?”, Vlad asked. Bruno nodded. Kyanide gives Bruno an old, loosened button. “This button means that you’re a member of Team Toxic!”, Kyanide declared. “We all have it. It corresponds to our favorite colors!”, Ivon explained. The team members were holding up buttons to show Bruno what they meant. Vlad had a red one, Kyanide had an orange one, Mercury had a yellow one, Laurel had a green one, Ivon had a cyan one, Aster had a purple one and Blossom had a pink one.

The bell rang. “Oops. Looks like we’ve got to explain more stuff during break, or in the hangout if you’re up for it”, Mercury said. Everyone murmured while walking back to their classes. Bruno couldn’t hold himself from smiling. Finally, he felt like he was where he belongs! He hasn’t felt this way ever since the last time he was a member of his former friend group. Bruno took a glimpse at Vlad, who was smiling back at him.

It was already break in a flash. Everyone ran out of class. Bruno was walking alone with Alex beside him. Bruno's stomach growled, but Bruno ignored it and continued to walk downstairs and into the ground alongside the other students. Bruno sat down with Alex, not even saying a word to him.

Chuckles erupted outside of Bruno's view. He looked around just to spot the Team Toxic members approaching him. "Hey Bruno!", Vlad greeted. Vlad pulled Bruno off the stairs that he was sitting in, leaving Alex alone. "Forgot you're a member now, huh?", Vlad asked. Bruno paused, then grinned. "Right! Hehe!", Bruno giggled. Bruno frowned soon after, taking a glance at Alex. "You can go with them, Bruno", Alex assured. Bruno gulped, turning his head back to his newest friends. Bruno walked away with them. He wanted to turn back to sitting with Alex, but it was too late. Alex already walked away with his food towards the bathroom doors. Bruno sighed.

"How are you feeling now, Bruno?", Mercury asked. Bruno's body trembled. "I don't know. I guess I feel… overwhelmed", Bruno answered. "It's fine. I felt this way when I joined the team too!", Laurel assured. Bruno smiled at Laurel, who was giving Bruno a pat on the back.

Bruno cleared his throat. He approached Mercury as he was fairly far from him. "So, what's the point of the team, exactly? I mean, the only thing I really heard about the team is that, they're like bullies", Bruno asked. "That's the whole point, Bruno boy", Mercury said. Mercury laughed right after he said that. "Bruno boy! Should that be a nickname?", Mercury asked, pausing the walk that the team was taking. "Well…", Kyanide sweated, avoiding telling the truth to the wrathful Mercury. Mercury stomped, almost seeming like he was shaking the ground. "I THINK IT WILL BE!", Mercury yelled. *"Wow, this guy sure has anger issues…"*, Bruno thought.

Bruno's metaphorical light bulb popped in his brain. A question sprung to his mind. "Are there roles in the team?", Bruno asked. Mercury nodded. "Of course! I'm the leader", Mercury explained. "I get rid of our enemies", Kyanide said. Vlad looked at his mirror. "I lure people into our team! But of course, I'm not doing that to you", Vlad said while he was looking at himself. "I'm the fists of the team!", Aster said while clenching his fists. Blossom twirled around and said, "And I'm the cute girl!". "I'm the steward. I provide the food… and eat it! Yum!", Laurel said while licking her lips. "I'm the head of intelligence", Ivon said. Ivon approached Bruno's ears and whispered, "… And someday, Mercury will promote me to being a vice leader!".

Bruno was pleased by everything that was going on. He was just wondering how was his original idea of letting these students see the light would work out. Nonetheless, he further asked, "Alright, but what is **my** role?". Mercury put his mind into motion. Eventually, he found out about the answer. "You're going to be… the moral support guy!", Mercury answered. Everyone gasped. "MORAL SUPPORT!? Are you CRAZY?!", Kyanide yelled, shaking Mercury's shoulders. "Tsk. I think Bruno is viable enough. His classmates did say that he's extremely empathetic after all", Mercury said. "Makes sense!", Vlad said. Bruno smiled wide and hugged Mercury. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!", Bruno kept on thanking. Mercury pushed Bruno away. "You know, one of the rules of the team is to give some personal space to members", Mercury said. Bruno chuckled in embarrassment afterward.

The team was walking through the field in the dusty ground. Bruno kept looking around. Bruno kept looking at the Team Toxic members, then to other students. He saw all the Class 3 members… talking in another language. It wasn't a language Bruno recognize, which confused him as anyone would be. He could only hear feint "Shut up" and another feint "No".

Bruno approached Blossom as she was the only Class 3 member who wasn't with the crowd. "Hey, Blossom. What's up with your classmates?", Bruno asked. "I don't know", Blossom answered with a small frown. "Why are they speaking in a different language? Do you even understand what they're saying?", Bruno asked. "That? Oh. Yeah, I do know. Dexter told me, but he said that the students should keep it a secret or else he'd hurt us", Blossom explained. Bruno gasped as he heard that. The Class 3 students were hiding something, weren't they? It had to be something malicious.

Suddenly, Laurel tripped while eating her Cheetos. "Ow!", she cried. Ivon brought her up with his arm. The members noticed that Laurel tripped… on a book? Not only one book—but a stack of it. The stack was buried in a hole on the sandy ground. While Laurel got up, Aster noticed the books. "Hey, what's that?", Aster asked. Ivon lifted all those books up and saw the covers. "Extra… ordinary?", Ivon read in confusion.

The book was dusted and ruffled up. While it is mostly because of the dust, the book's scruffy appearance might mean something else. The book had some odd aura surrounding it that all the Team Toxic members felt in unison. It's as if the book is… paranormal. Inter-dimensional. There were 12 books stacked on top of each other. The books seemed familiar to him. So oddly familiar. Once Ivon blew the dust away, the books were revealed to have a brown border of a rectangle that was randomly colored on the inside. The paper on the inside is white, though with a subtle yellow tint with scratch marks on it. The book's material was no different than a regular diary.

Mercury took the books and looked closely at it. He skimmed through the pages in a fast pace. It's a surprise that none of the letters have even been wiped out. Everything on the inside was squeaky clean. Not a single symbol has been wiped out. Some aspects were odd though. There were only 3 books missing out of the supposed 13.

"Well, someone must've left it here… and that someone has to be ambitious!", Mercury chuckled. He pulled the books towards his chest. Aster took the books with a greedy face. "These are mine now!", Aster declared. Blossom took the books. "It's mine!", Blossom yelled. Bruno pushed the two away and grabbed the books for himself. "Guys! I know this book", Bruno said.

Everyone froze and stared at him. "Hah! Must be an obscure book series then!", Vlad said. Bruno's friends all laughed and laughed. Bruno didn't laugh the same way his friends just did. "Bruno? What's the matter?", Mercury asked. Bruno looked at all the books closely. He even flipped the pages one by one, his eyes shivering in shock and fear. "This can't be… newer issues of my book!?", Bruno exclaimed.

Bruno pulled his backpack out of his back. He sat down and searched through the bag. He eventually found the three books. "Here it is! Extra… EXTRAORDINARY!", Bruno realized. He placed the books on top of each other and discovered the pattern. Each of the book's inner rectangle were colored by the colors of the rainbow, at least in the first 7 books. "You mean… you wrote these books!?", Aster exclaimed. "So, these were you books you were writing during class…", Vlad said. Bruno smiled and nodded. He lifted the books up as he lifted himself. "I only wrote these three… How come are there 12 more?", Bruno asked. Mercury took one of the books and compared them. Mercury looked behind and saw some dates. The date wrote "Written in: 24 April 2023" in Book 6. "2023?!", Mercury exclaimed.

Everyone gasped together. "So this must've been from the future!", Laurel concluded. "But how? Is there, like, some time travel machine here?", Blossom asked. Bruno stared at the books, almost wanting to tear up. "I… I don't know", Bruno said. Mercury took all the books from Bruno. "I'll investigate these books. If I don't succeed, then you'll investigate or keep it, Bruno. We might've discovered something cool!", Mercury said. "Alright!", Bruno answered. Everyone

walked away from the situation, except for Bruno. He was walking at the same distance as Aster and Blossom.

"You write books, huh?", Aster asked. Bruno gulped, blushed then nodded. "Nice", Aster complimented. "I could never imagine myself doing something that cool", Aster said. "Well, I did stop writing a while ago. I just wasn't motivated to", Bruno replied. The three continued walking.

Chapter 7
Sunset Beach

In the sunset, everyone walked back to the hangout together. Everyone was laughing and having fun with their conversations. The topics were both trivial and serious and everything in between. Once the Team Toxic members reached the middle of the path between the hangout and the school, which is under many trees, the team took a pause for some reason.

"Oh! Blossom and I have to go somewhere", Aster said. "Where?", Mercury asked. He held up a paper that came out of his jacket's pocket. "We're going to Sunset Beach", Aster answered. Laurel gasped. "Sunset Beach? That's kind of far!", Laurel exclaimed. Aster brushed that worry off. Sunset Beach was only located in the far north of the city. It's not too far off from the hangout either—much closer than the school in fact. "It's going to be fine, guys", Aster assured. "Oh right! Who wants to come with us?", Aster asked. Everyone was silent as a brick. Vlad broke the silence by saying, "I don't think anyone of us does". "Alright! C'mon, Bloss! Let's go!", Aster said with confidence.

He and Blossom dashed off to some bus. Bruno noticed and asked to the team, "Do their parents even know they're going to a beach?". "I don't think so. They rarely do stuff under their parent's permission", Mercury answered. Bruno's jaw was slightly open in shock.

"Well, forget about them", Ivon said. "Let's go to the hangout already".

The team continued walking, but Bruno looked back, seeing the bus drive away into the unknown. Bruno looked at his friends and continued walking with uncertainty of how things will work out.

At the beach, Aster and Blossom set up their things and relax, watching as the sun sets in the sky. The sky was a mix of pink, purple, orange and blue. It was gorgeous. The two never saw a sunset like that… or a sunset at all! All they've ever seen are sunrises through the windows of their house.

"This is cool, isn't it?", Aster asked. Blossom nodded, seemingly upset about something. Aster got up from laying down on the towel he laid out on the sand. "What's the matter?", Aster asked. Blossom turned her head towards Aster. "I was just thinking about stuff", Blossom said. "About your classmates speaking like aliens, huh?", Aster asked. Blossom blinked and froze like a statue. "No" Blossom denied with a bit of a huff from her nose.

Aster chuckled. "Yeah, right", he said. Blossom was in the shallow water as she couldn't swim—neither Aster can. Blossom kept on splashing on the water until Aster jumped into the water. "Geronimo!", he yelled. Blossom screamed out loud. Aster splashed a lot of water into Blossom's face. Aster's face was covered in sand. He spit it out. "That was amazing!", Aster swooned. "Aww. My face is sandy though", he added in sadness. "And you covered my face in water! Look at me!", Blossom yelled. Aster chuckled.

The sunset turned to dusk then to twilight. A lot of people have left the beach, but Aster and Blossom weren't one of them. They were only sitting under the umbrella, trying to not think about their parents and what would they do to them. The main reason why they did go to the beach is to run away from their parents.

Darkness peaked out from the sky. The two noticed that everyone left except for them. The two got up and packed their stuff. "Come on, let's

go", Aster said. On their way back to the exit of the beach, which was on the opposite side of where they were sitting, the shores were crying out waves. The waves flashed through the seas. Blossom was watching it all.

Suddenly, Blossom spotted a body on the shore, but Aster didn't. Blossom gasped as soon as she saw it. Blossom looked around the body in shock and horror. She shook Aster's body before he could even take another step out of Blossom's reach. "Aster, look at this!" , Blossom exclaimed. Blossom pointed at the body once Aster turned his head towards her. Aster gasped. He moved towards the body.

"We should really take this guy to the hospital", Blossom said. "Duh!", Aster comically replied. Aster lifted up the body up with his immense strength. However, Aster fell down because of the body weight. The body was that of an adult after all. Aster and Blossom carried the body together after an agreement that was made to work together. The body was fairly heavy for one 13-year-old. Adding on with a 12-year-old will make the body easier to carry.

Aster and Blossom sat on the bus with the lifeless body. They were silent as they watched the body flinch around when the bus bumps through a hump. The two saw the light-filled city in the dark night. It was a sight to see for sure. Aster and Blossom were silent as they were thinking about how their parents would feel, seeing them hold a lifeless body into one of their houses—or apartment in Blossom's case.

"So, what should we do with this guy?", Blossom asked. Aster thought, then snapped his fingers. "I know what! Let's take him to the hangout!", Aster answered. Aster hit a button that'd indicate to the driver that they should stop the bus and let the passenger out. Aster and Blossom got out of the bus, holding the body. The driver stared at the two and continued driving with an awkward face.

Aster and Blossom rushed through the forest then reached the hangout, dripping with sweat. The sweat was even more severe since they're carrying a body. The two rushed through many doors just to reach the Team Toxic room. The team member turned their heads to Aster and Bloom as soon as they cracked the door open.

Aster and Blossom grunted as they fell down from carrying the body, and from running a lot. Everyone gasped and ran to them. Laurel and Ivon were carrying the body to a 9th bed among the other 8 more that were laid out. The 8th was being reserved for Bruno at the time. Mercury shook Aster harshly. "What happened!?", Mercury asked. Aster woke up at the same time with Blossom. "Me and Blossom! We saw a body in the shore of Sunset Beach! We didn't know what to do with it, so we decided to bring it here", Aster explained while sweating a lot. Everyone looked shocked while Aster was explaining that. It was so sudden that nobody could really take in what happened.

"So, you saw a body… in the beach?", Vlad asked. "That's ridiculous!", Kyanide added. Mercury chuckled like a maniac afterward. He even had a smile of one. "Oh, no, no, no! This might be the discovery… of something new!", Mercury declared. Mercury paused and looked at the Extraordinary books. "Oh right. I forgot to investigate those!", Mercury said. Everyone sighed.

"We'll take care of the body. Aster, Blossom, you two can relax", Ivon said. Laurel pulled up a salad bowl. "Let's feed this dude!", Laurel exclaimed. Laurel placed the bowl on the bed stand and kept on giving the body lettuce, but the mouth ejected the lettuce away. Aster pushed Laurel and Ivon away. Blossom came forward with Aster. "How about **we** deal with it", Aster said, apparently feeling better than a few moments ago.

Aster kept on shaking the body around and yelling, "GET UP!". The eyes opened. The arm started moving. The leg twitched around. Finally, the man was alive! "Wh-what?", he asked. The man froze on

the spot, staring at Aster and Blossom, who were laying on his stomach. Suddenly, the man yelled. Blossom started yelling. Aster shut Blossom's mouth, then the man's. "Aster… BLOSSOM! WHAT!?", the man yelled. "What?", Aster asked. The man twitched around, even biting his nails with his gritty teeth.

"You're back!", the man cried. Aster and Blossom looked at each other, confused. "Uhm. What?", Blossom asked with a slightly confused chuckle. The man suddenly hugged Aster and Blossom. Aster pushed him away. "Woah, woah, woah! Ok, what is going on?", Aster asked. The man looked at the two, exchanging who he should look at. "You… You don't remember me?", the man asked. The man realized something and widened his eyes. "Oh… right… you're little…", the man sighed.

Mercury came up to the man, touching the hand of the guy. "Hey, whatever's wrong, we're going to help you", Mercury assured. The man smiled. "Mercury… ok!", the man replied. "How do you know our names anyways?", Ivon asked. The man frowned and looking down at the blanket. "I'll explain that another time…", the man answered. He laid down and began to fall asleep. "I think the rest of you should go too", Mercury suggested. Everyone agreed and got back home except for Mercury.

In the quiet night, Mercury stayed alone while the hangout's lights closed. At some point during the night, a student came to the Team Toxic room in order to close the nights. The student went by the name of Norman, though he is nicknamed by his classmates as Shaggy because of his shaggy-like voice and appearance. He is also a classmate of Mercury, a member of Class 1.

"Mercury? Aren't you going home yet?", Norman asked. Mercury turned his head to see Norman beside the door. "I'm not going back home until 11. As leader of Team Toxic, I think you should extend the time for me", Mercury said. Norman gulped, knowing what

Mercury could do if he said no. “Of course, Mercury”, Norman said, walking backwards and away from Mercury. He closed the door slowly. Mercury snickered to himself.

Mercury went up to his desk and sat on his wooden seat. He looked at the stack of books, one of them opened on the table and laid out. Mercury read the book thoroughly. “Ugh!”, Mercury moaned. Mercury seemed to can’t make heads or tails of what the book means.

Mercury slammed the book on top of the stack. Mercury facepalmed then slid his hands across his hair. “Maybe Bruno can. He did say he wrote the first three books”, Mercury said to himself. Mercury put the books into one big plastic bag that was apparently in the storage closet of the room.

Suddenly, the man woke up from being dead asleep. The man looked at Mercury who kept on talking to himself in denial. Mercury seemed to be walking around in circles verbally. The man, who was watching Mercury, pushed his blanket away and looked at Mercury.

“I might know”, the man said. Mercury noticed the voice, turning back to see the man getting out his bed. Mercury scoffed, saying “Oh, you’re awake”. The man scratched his hair a little bit. “I just can’t sleep right now”, the man replied. Mercury took the books into his bag and carried it on his back. “Alright. Please just stay here”, Mercury said. The man sat on the bed full of confusion on his mind. “Why?”, the man asked. “My parents won’t be fine seeing you with me. I’ll tell Craig about you so you can stay”, Mercury replied. The man frowned, though he didn’t really say a word to Mercury. He only watched Mercury get out of the door. When the door opened, the only light the man could see came out. The door closed soon after by Mercury though.

The man sighed and laid on his bed. He looked around for anything but he couldn’t. He turned his back to the bed stand only to see a picture of all the Team Toxic members, excluding Bruno.

However, a drawing of Bruno had been taped to the picture. Once the man noticed that, he gasped out loud and took the picture, looking closely at it. “It can’t be… Bruno? He’s a part of Team Toxic now…”, the man said. The man put the picture back to its place, then saw the beds in a rainbow-like order. Red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue, purple and pink blankets in those beds, corresponding to the members’ buttons and favorite colors. The man looked down into his bed, seeing that the blanket is black. “The ninth bed, huh?”, the man asked. The man laid down, beginning to close his eyes and falling asleep for the night.

Chapter 8
Caught Confused

In the morning, the Team Toxic members gathered up in Class 1. Kyanide was jumping up, trying to reach the white board. However, he was too short to do so. Nonetheless, Kyanide continued to jump higher and higher, but couldn't reach the whiteboard. "Damn it!", Kyanide yelled. Kyanide took a marker and threw it on top of the whiteboard, just for it to fall right into Kyanide's face. Vlad approached Kyanide.

"What's the matter?", Vlad asked. Kyanide sighed, saying "I want to reach this whiteboard the same way our—my classmates do so! They're all so tall… I want to be as tall as them!", Kyanide said. "But it's so much hard work!", he added. While Kyanide was talking, Vlad was looking at a reflection of himself that was made from the whiteboard. Even if it was subtle, Vlad still looked at himself.

Suddenly, Bruno slammed the door open and entered the classroom. "Good morning, everyone!", Bruno greeted, smiling at everyone. The Team Toxic members smiled back, but the Class 1 students couldn't care less and continued to mind their own business. "Hey Bruno!", Blossom greeted back. Bruno sat in Kyanide's place, strangely not upsetting him, probably because Kyanide was too busy trying to reach the whiteboard.

Bruno led out a sigh of relief. "This class feels so nice!", Bruno said. "Thanks. It was Blue who put perfume into this classroom", a student said in the distance. Bruno looked around the classroom in confusion. He could do so because he was in the back of the entire class. "Who's Blue? Scratch that—who is anyone in this class?", Bruno asked. Ivon chuckled. "Seems like you've got a lot of introducing to do", Ivon said. Everyone else chuckled, including Bruno.

Bruno looked at the tables, then overheard his friends talking about what happened in the hangout. Bruno lifted his arms up then crossed it on his back, and let his leg loose on the table.

"So, what happened in the hangout while I was with my classmates?", Bruno asked. Everyone in the team came forward, even Kyanide and Vlad. Kyanide seemed tired though. Everyone stood still in silence and awkwardness. "Nothing much", Mercury answered. Everyone suddenly pretended to ignore the bigger question.

Mercury whistled, trying to his best not to release his fury. Kyanide almost fell asleep. Vlad looked at his mirror that he kept on his pocket. Aster counted his dollars on his palm. Blossom stared at Bruno "in the heart". Ivon tapped his toes on the floor while Laurel ate the chocolate bar that she kept in her pocket.

Bruno looked disappointed, sighing right after. "Alright", Bruno replied. "Look, we just had some… discussions about what happened in our classes!", Vlad said. Vlad winked, saying soon after "And they think our class is cool". Bruno smiled wide and tried to hold back his giggling. Bruno looked at the clock. "I think I have to go now. Alex needs me", Bruno said.

He got up, pushing the chair away. Bruno got his steps out of the door and into his class's. Team Toxic took glances at each other, then led out deep sighs of relief.

Mercury and Kyanide sat on their respective seats while the other members stood in front of them. "Lucky that Bruno didn't find out!", Aster said. "Yeah. If he did then he'd go bonkers!", Blossom said. Mercury sighed, scratching his hair for a moment. "Well, we won't know for too long", Mercury said. "Why?", Vlad asked. Mercury was close to bringing out tears out of his face. "The man is going to come today! He told me when I went to the hangout this morning to check on him!", Mercury said.

The members' jaws dropped together. "No way!", Laurel denied. "If he does come, then he might scare the entire school!", Ivon stated. Mercury put his metaphorical thinking glasses on. He looked out of the window that was behind the classroom. "I'll try to keep him away from the school", Mercury said. "Sweet! Maybe by then, I can jump high into the air and flop right onto him!", Kyanide said. Mercury rolled his eyes, making the similar motion with his fingers while Kyanide was saying so.

Blossom juggling her feet around, getting prepped for something. "Maybe I can do it!", Blossom said with energy. She ran to the whiteboard, with everyone in the team following her, then jumped high up to the point where she reached the whiteboard. Kyanide's mouth puckered up, being left silent while his friends all cheered Blossom.

"Sucks to be younger than me, huh?", Blossom taunted after being celebrated for. Kyanide grew to be even redder than before. Everyone else laughed. The other Class 1 students were left puzzled or amused by what they just witnessed.

Once Bruno entered back into his class, Bruno saw the girls playing volleyball while the boys were forming circles and talking about the dirtiest of things. Bruno was worried that he'd get hit by the ball—not for Alex though. He was considered "safe". No teacher was present as of that time.

One ball tossed to another's arm. Outside the door, and seen on the window was a girl. A girl Bruno hadn't seen yet in the school, which confused and even scared him. Bruno stared at the girl, who was staring back at him. Once the girl made a creepy expression with a snarling grin, Bruno turned to Alex and shook him. "Alex, I saw a girl at the door!", Bruno said to Alex. Alex looked at the window, but only saw a girl walking away. "Hm. Must be one of those Class 3 girls. Chelsea is her name, I believe so", Alex said. "She's a good friend of

Carly and Sarah, so she could be paying a visit to them", Alex added. Bruno looked out, wondering where the girl could be. He ignored the door all together soon after.

The "match" was still going strong, of course with some hiccups here and there. The ball would always fall into the tables of the boys, which annoyed them. The boys were playing Monopoly somehow. It was apparently Maverick who brought the board. He thought that he and his friends would have more fun if they did have a board game. "Mandy, please tell the girls to shut up!", Renard yelled. "Why? We're having so much fun!", Bella swooned. The girls all giggled together while Sarah holds the ball. The boys sighed. Alex and Bruno were left to be in the middle ground. "Hey, Alex, Bruno, want to play with us?", Riley asked. Bruno looked at the board game. "Sure!", Bruno responded. "If Bruno plays, then ok", Alex added.

Meanwhile, Mandy held the ball after Violet threw it to her. Mandy looked at all the girls, thinking who to give it to. She snickered as she came up with a devious idea. Mandy, with the ball grasped on her hands, ran out of the door with it. The girls gasped. Sarah chased her. "MANDY!", Sarah yelled.

The boys watched in utter amusement, but continued to play Monopoly anyways. Max was winning, as he usually does. Mandy hid behind the lockers, without Sarah even noticing. However, Sarah did so after sensing that someone was there when she passed the lockers. Eventually, she found Mandy. As soon as she did, Mandy froze and turned invisible.
"MANDY!", Sarah screamed.

Her scream was so loud that workers could hear it! Oddly enough, nobody went on to inspect what was going on.

Sarah ran back to class soon as she realized her screams. She ran like a coward! Once she entered, she heard a laughing stock coming out. The only student who wasn't laughing was Carly. "What

took you so long?", Carly asked. Sarah didn't answer, only focusing on the laughing. "Uh, what's going on?", Sarah asked. "That? Right. Just look at Alex", Carly sighed. Carly took steps away from Sarah as she walked towards Alex.

Suddenly, Sarah laughed the hardest out of anyone! Alex was wearing a beanie. A beanie so long that it covered his eyes! Since Alex was wearing a jacket that day, he covered himself completely with the jacket. Alex didn't even look like a human! He looked like some silly shadow monster.

"So, Sarah. Have you found that silly ball-stealing ghost yet?", Carly asked, enraged. Sarah's mind lit up once again, which is a first time for the girl. Sarah's brain rarely functions like a normal one. Most of the time, Sarah thinks about bullying and being violent against others. When she isn't thinking of those things, Sarah would think of how rich she is, at least when she is with her mother. "Not yet", Sarah answered. Carly facepalmed and walked out of the door, opening it almost wide.

"I'll do the job then", Carly said without any consideration that anyone else will help. Sarah watched in gloom as Carly got away from the classroom and walked towards the hall, looking closely for her tricky ghost classmate. Carly's leg won't stop stomping and making lots of noise on the ground. She couldn't care less about the commotion. Carly turned back to see her classroom behind her. Laughing kept on sprouting out of the class as Carly walked away from the classroom.

Meanwhile, Mandy laughed and snickered through her flying. Mandy flied through walls, invisible while she was doing so. Mandy watched the other classes study unlike her class was doing. This was all because Mrs. Garcia was late. Very late. Especially compared to the other teachers. Mrs. Garcia would always come at 9:15 AM instead of the 8:30 that she was intended to. Because of this, she left her co-

workers, boss and her students hanging for a while. Also, this would leave her students to commit “childish” things, like playing volleyball in class.

Mandy reached the girl’s locker room and left the ball on her locker. Mandy locked the locker, pulling her key out and twisted it through the keyhole. Mandy had a cheeky grin and an equally cheeky laugh.

Carly came into the locker room, her sweat going through her skin. “Come out, come out wherever you are ghost girl!”, Carly sung while walking menacingly across the locker room. Carly peaked through every locker that she could, but it was unsuccessful. She couldn’t look through much anyway, since most of the lockers were, well, locked.

Carly suddenly saw Mandy’s locker open. “Oopsie daisy. Forgot about this!”, Mandy said while pulling out an Usher concert poster. She was still invisible, somehow. She could still be heard.

As soon as Mandy was about to close the locker, Carly rushed in, opened the locker and got the ball out. Mandy returned from being invisible, finally being visible again. Mandy even fell from levitating. “Shoot! You got me!”, Mandy hissed. Carly laughed while holding the ball. Carly started running out of the door. “Now come and catch me!”, Carly taunted.

Before Carly got out, Carly bumped into Mrs. Garcia, seemingly disappointment by what happened. She couldn’t bear seeing her students acting so naughty. “Mom!”, Carly yelped. Mrs. Garcia stared into Carly’s soul, with the stare that a mother could only have. It was even more daunting that her mother is her teacher. Mandy, in the background, chuckled in silence.

“What is going on here?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Carly gulped out loud, trying to avoid telling the truth before it got spilled by Mandy. “We were just… er…”. Mandy shut herself up as soon as she realized

that if she told the truth, then she would get in big trouble too. Mandy is guilty, if not even more guilty, as much as the other students were.

Mrs. Garcia led out a sigh. “Let’s talk about this in class”, Mrs. Garcia said. She was as disappointed as a mother seeing her child fail in a test. The girls got out of the locker room and into the classroom.

No lessons were being held during class. Mrs. Garcia was too tired to speak out another word. The teacher only handed out worksheets about past English lessons that were held about a week ago. The same lesson stayed static ever since last Tuesday. It was about writing fleshed out characters in a story.

Perhaps it could help Bruno in writing his Extraordinary book, but he was too busy investigating the other 12 books. Violet also knew of the art of writing, so things were easy for her too. As for other students: none could care less. Not even Alex. Alex was only writing his Minecraft-themed book.

Mrs. Garcia was about to fall asleep. She actually did so after calling out Maverick and Mandy, who were talking in a loud tone. They always talk loud though. It was odd that Mrs. Garcia even snapped until this point.

Bruno looked at Mrs. Garcia and sighed. “Looks like today’s one of those days again”, Bruno said to himself. He was thinking about the days where nothing happens. Where boring seems to take over the fun in school. Bruno looked at Alex who was sitting right beside him. Alex was reading his book again. Bruno sighed, thinking about his own book. He was fairly eager to investigate it, but Mercury took over that.

While feeling bored, Craig approached Bruno with his steps in front of his feet. His walking seemed to form a little zig-zag pattern on the floor. Craig finally reached Bruno, humping his hands onto Bruno’s table. “Hello, Bruno”, Craig greeted. Bruno turned his head to Craig,

who was standing above Bruno's height. Bruno glanced at Craig, with his eyebrow raising like the sun above the other. "Hey Craig. What do you want?", Bruno asked. Craig cleared his rusty throat, yet still having his creaky voice when he was saying, "I want to tell you something that I know is bothering you". Bruno sighed, thinking about something that Craig isn't thinking of saying. "Is it about advertising the hangout?", Bruno asked so suddenly. "You know I don't want to do that. The friend groups already cover that", Bruno added, looking down at his wooden tabletop.

Apparently, ever since the hangout opened, Craig has been asking Bruno if he could advertise the hangout. However, Bruno always declines to do so since he never liked to be a sell-out. He wanted to stay humble and keep to himself.

Craig jumped for a moment in shock. "What! No, no, no!", Craig denied. Craig sighed once more. "Vlad told me that you were wondering about what happened last night", Craig said. Bruno's mind lifted up from his drowsiness. Bruno lifted his once on the table head the same way his mind did. "And?", Bruno asked, curious to hear what Craig has to say. "You see, the Team Toxic were investigating the books together and".

Craig got stopped by Mrs. Garcia, who got her spirits up for the moment. "Craig, please get back to your seat", Mrs. Garcia ordered. Craig sighed once he heard that. Craig walked away from Bruno while saying, "Sorry, but it looks like I'm not the one who has to tell you that".

Bruno turned red. Extremely red. Bruno was outraged by this, but only on the inside. He bottled up his feelings so frequently that this is just a normal occurrence for him.

Bruno's curiosity got the best of his emotions. Not in a way anyone would expect, of course. Bruno only got mad on the inside. He luckily didn't lash out at anyone. Who knows what would happen if he got mad that he didn't even find out about the simple mystery?

Chapter 9
Teacher Trouble

In the break, everyone was preparing their conversations. Members of friend groups plan out their speeches. Break time is high time for these sorts of activities, since in lunch time, everyone is too caught up in eating. As soon as the school bell sang, everyone rushed out of their classrooms as if they're rushing out to the bathroom while they're experiencing digestive problems.

Bruno approached the Team Toxic members, who were out in the sandy field. It was so sandy that everyone's dresses got a bit dusty and their shoes got muddy for some reason.

The members were watching Kyanide try his best to jump up high. It seems like jumping high is the only thing Kyanide could even think of for the day! Apparently, Kyanide wants to jump high all because he got inspired by seeing an informercial on TV, advertising shoes that make you jump high into the air.

"Hey guys", Bruno greeted, but not in his usual cheery tone. Rather, he had a demented tone. He looked like he saw a dog die in front of his eyes or he saw a nuclear bomb explode in front of his very eyes. Of course, the members noticed, at least most of them did.

"Hey Bruno. What's the matter?", Mercury asked. Vlad, who followed Bruno from the class to where he is now, walked into the crowd that Team Toxic formed among the members. Vlad wore a mischievous grin on his face as he said "Oh, Bruno just wanted to know what happened to us". The members took glances at each other, confused

"You mean what happened in the hangout, right?", Laurel asked while stuffing her face in muffins. Vlad nodded. "Bruno, I saw what

happened between you and Craig earlier", Vlad suddenly said to Bruno. Bruno gulped, almost wanting to hide himself. "Right", Bruno said.

Kyanide was still struggling on jumping high. He kept on trying to fling himself up to reach the roof top that was branching from the main roof of the bathrooms.

"Look, I'm just curious. I don't want to be left out of a team that I just joined", Bruno said. Bruno looked like he was about to cry.

"You can't expect everything from simply joining a team, Bruno. Sometimes, it takes time to build trust, or earn trust as some say", Mercury advised Bruno. Mercury gripped his hand on Bruno's shoulder. Everyone was smiling at Bruno, except for Kyanide who was focusing on his jumping.

Bruno now knows why Mercury is the leader of this team. It's because he's the wisest. Seemingly the most mature. It's not only those things, but it's also because Mercury is the first member to form the team and the one who even came up with the idea of it.

Bruno lifted himself up mentally. Bruno suddenly asked, "Will you answer my questions now?". Everyone in the team froze. They didn't want to deal with telling the truth! So, they told a lie. A white lie. "No, because it's top secret", Mercury said while winking. Bruno looked at all of them with a saddened face. Bruno sighed, defeated. "Alright", Bruno said.

Bruno, without saying a word, walked away from the team, leaving them by themselves. Bruno went to Alex instead since he believed that Alex would provide better emotional support than the team did. *They are called Team **Toxic** for a reason*, Bruno thought. The members couldn't care less about Bruno suddenly leaving. They were used to it since new members were always like this.

Bruno sighed, walked with Alex. Despite walking with Alex, he felt somewhat alone. Bruno kept staring at Alex's dead-looking face as they were walking. Bruno only left his sadness to himself. He didn't want to overwhelm Alex after all. They just met.

Suddenly, a man approached the two, calling out "Bruno! Alex!". The man wore a black tuxedo. He looked like he was going out to some fancy party full of posh people. Bruno and Alex took their attention to him. The man tried to catch his breath, panting countless times.

"Those are your names, right?", the man asked. Bruno and Alex moved their eyes to each other, then Bruno said with a questioning tone "Yeah?". "Right! Mrs. Garcia won't shut up about the two of you!", the man chuckled.

The man stood up with a straight posture. He straightened his tie as he said, "I'm Mr. Mando, but I think you already know me!". Bruno snickered. "I don't think so!", he said. Alex frowned and stared at Mr. Mando. "You're the homeroom teacher of Class 3, right?", Alex asked. Mr. Mando affirmed the question with a nod. He had a smug smile while talking to them for some reason. It's almost like Mr. Mando is proud of being in the school, which is a first time for him. The man almost always looks depressed!

Mr. Mando realized that he came to them for a reason. That reason is important. "Do you know where your teacher, Mrs. Garcia is?", Mr. Mando asked. Bruno and Alex put their heads together and tried their best to recall if they've seen Mrs. Garcia anywhere or not. Luckily,

Alex remembered. "Yes. She was on her way to Floor 11. She is probably looking to talk to Sylvia", Alex answered. Mr. Mando's face lit up, but at the same time, he sighed. Mixed signals kept coming up to him.

"Why do you need her anyways?", Alex asked. Bruno smiled with a spiny look to his face. "Is it because you want to confess to

her?", Bruno asked. Mr. Mando felt like he got electrocuted. Mr. Mando looked around the hall, looking if any of his devious students told any of the Class 2—or anyone—about his secret crush. "How did you know?", Mr. Mando asked. Bruno coughed with a straight face this time. "Maybe because it's obvious? I mean, all my classmates told me about that", Bruno said.

Mr. Mando blinked, standing still like a statue. Perhaps keeping crushes to himself is way too hard for him. What makes things worse is how much of loud-mouthed his students are.

Mr. Mando gripped himself and his necktie. "Well,", Mr. Mando said, holding himself back from tearing up in embarrassment, "I just wanted to talk to your teacher about a serious subject". The boys exchanged looks at each other, wondering what could that mean. They didn't say a thing though. "Alright", Bruno said. Mr. Mando jogged to Floor 11, leaving the boys deserted and confused.

"Must be something important, huh", Bruno said to Alex. "Indeed", Alex affirmed. They knew that whatever it is, it probably means something strange is going to happen. Either that or the staff would announce that some stupid test to going to come into play the next week.

On Mr. Mando's way through the hall of Floor 11, which was a lot smaller than Floor 8's. This might because the floor had a lot of classes, 5 to be specific. Not only that, but the floor was also filled with school facilities, like the music and cooking rooms. Some people of the school would call the halls of Floors 9-12 as corridors. The floors are so small that some grades would have to mix in the grades.

Mr. Mando finally reached Floor 11. Mr. Mando saw Mrs. Garcia stepping out of Grade 11's Class 4, walking out with Mr. Barley and Mrs. Delilah. Mr. Mando turned red in both jealousy and disappointment. The teachers noticed Mr. Mando and went up to him.

“Oh Mr. Mando! We were wondering where you were”, Mrs. Delilah said. Mr. Mando didn’t seem as delighted as the other 3 teachers. As a matter of fact, he seemed to be exasperated. Nonetheless, Mr. Mando held himself back from showing his fury the same way he did towards his students. “What were you doing?”, Mr. Mando asked, folding his arms and tilting away from the teachers. “We were just talking to Ms. Sylvia”, Mr. Barley said. Mr. Mando looked away from the other teachers. Mrs. Delilah and Mr. Barley didn’t think it mattered, but Mrs. Garcia did. She knew Mr. Mando well enough that she’s really the only person who ever knew him as Marcel.

Mrs. Garcia approached Mr. Mando who was fairly far from the others. “Anything wrong?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Mr. Mando got himself straight, physically and mentally. He soaked up tears that were about to fall upon his eyes. “Nothing. I was just thinking of my students”, Mr. Mando lied, ignoring his feelings.

Mr. Mando shook himself up and remembered what he came there for. “Right! I forgot to tell you all”, Mr. Mando realized. Mrs. Delilah had a worried expression while Mr. Barley didn’t seem so amused. “What is it?”, Mrs. Delilah asked with shock. “One of my students told me that some man is coming to our school”, Mr. Mando replied, disappointed by the news.

The teachers gasped together. “Who told you that?”, Mr. Barley asked. Mr. Mando tried to remember, and he did. “Blossom”, Mr. Mando replied. The teachers’ once surprised turned to a very unsurprised and bored one, except for Mrs. Garcia who was still surprised. “Blossom? Would you really believe her?”, Mr. Barley asked. Mr. Mando thought about it and realized that Mr. Barley was right. The sentiment the teachers had about Team Toxic was terrible, so it was so surprise that they acted this way even towards who they call “the most tolerable member”.

Mr. Barley looked at his watch. He obviously led out a fake shocked face. Mr. Barley grabbed Mrs. Delilah on the tummy and said, “Well, we got to go! See you during lunch!”. The two ran away together down to Floor 8. Mr. Mando sighed.

Mrs. Garcia approached Mr. Mando with a comforting face. “Well, Blossom isn’t **that** bad”, Mrs. Garcia said. Mr. Mando smiled, knowing how much of a good friend Mrs. Garcia is. He knew her more than the others since the two were friends since they were teenagers. “If anything happens, then don’t be afraid to tell me”, Mrs. Garcia assured. Mr. Mando nodded to what he just heard, with his mind being put to rest.

Once they calmed down, Bruno suddenly appeared, asking “Who told you that?”. The teachers jumped in a scare, noticing that Bruno was there all along, secretly hearing everything that has been said. “Blossom?”, Mr. Mando asked. Mrs. Garcia seemed mad that Bruno was listening to the teachers behind their backs.

“Ok, but who told Blossom?”, Bruno asked. Mr. Mando took a confused glance at Mrs. Garcia, wondering what is up with Bruno. Mr. Mando gulped down through his neck and answered, “Herself?”. “Look, she said that she knew who’ll come but she isn’t comfortable telling me”, Mr. Mando explain. Bruno silently thought to himself about what could this mean.

Before Bruno could say anything, the bell rang. “Well, it’s time for the lesson”, Mrs. Garcia said. Bruno remembered what lesson is next. Once he did, his face instantly turned blank. “Aww. Not Cooking class!”, Bruno moaned. Mrs. Garcia chuckled. “And it looks like I have to go for Randall”, Mrs. Garcia added.

Mr. Mando sighed, recalling that Mrs. Garcia and Mr. Jeffery were married and had children who are studying in the same school he and her were working in. Mr. Mando sighed loudly as Mrs. Garcia walked away, trying his best to get Mrs. Garcia to notice him. Sadly,

that didn't work, at least sadly for him. Mr. Mando followed Bruno on their way downstairs to Floor 8.

On their way, they had a manly talk—at least that's what Bruno likes to call it. "Thinking about teacher, huh?", Bruno asked. Mr. Mando nodded, saddened. "It's fine! I dealt with this before", Bruno said. Mr. Mando looked at Bruno, almost tearing up. "It's much more than that. I mean, they had kids for crying out loud!", Mr. Mando said. Bruno felt he had an electricity flowing through him when Mr. Mando said that. "Oh, no! I meant by something else", Bruno said.

Mr. Mando watched as Bruno walked to his class, nonchalantly. Mr. Mando unfortunately didn't have any emotional support anymore—though the only emotional support he had at that moment was a boy who had different thought patterns than him.

Bruno was sitting in the cooking room, waiting for Mr. Munz just like his classmates. However, instead of talking or reading the cookbook, Bruno won't stop thinking about what he heard from Mr. Mando. The voices in his head even sounded similar to that of Mr. Mando's. *"Look, she said that she knew who'll come"*, the voice spelled out for Bruno. *"Who is the one that Blossom knows? Is this why the team is even acting so… weird towards me? Granted, I did just meet them but still…"*, Bruno kept on thinking. His thoughts were driving quickly, at almost the speed of cars at a Formula One race. *One thought. Two thoughts. Three thoughts. So on and so forth. One topic only.*

Alex took an oddly quick enough of a time to notice how Bruno was feeling. "Bruno?", Alex asked in concern. Bruno's brain woke up and noticed Alex back, chuckling like a maniac soon after.

"Sorry. I was just… thinking about stuff", Bruno lied with his fingers crossed behind his back and taking his eyes away from Alex.

Alex saw that and sighed. "I know you're thinking about Team Toxic", Alex said bluntly as possible. Bruno sighed, ready to admit it. "Yeah, I am", Bruno said in defeat. Alex sighed the same way Bruno

did. “I told you so many times, Bruno, but you never listen to me”, Alex said, sounding demented. Bruno’s mouth was about to fall apart, but it didn’t. “I just want to know how the members feel”, Bruno excused.

Alex then wondered what Bruno was really thinking about in detail. “What were you really thinking about though?”, Alex asked. Bruno tried to piece whatever he’s thinking about into a coherent sentence.

“You see, the members were sort of ignoring me when I asked them what happened when I was gone for a night in the hangout. They just won’t answer my questions! I asked in Class 1, I asked Craig—sort of, I just asked them during break. Even Vlad knows I’ve got questions but he just won’t answer it!”, Bruno explained, almost losing his mind and raising his volume.

Alex gestured Bruno to lower down his tone while saying, “Calm down! It’s normal”.

Bruno listened to Alex’s assurance, but didn’t fully take note into what he actually said. “I can just tell Vlad. Simple”, Alex smiled with smugness in his cheeks. Bruno didn’t believe that. He thought it was harder to even talk to Vlad when this madness is going on.

Coincidentally, Vlad was just passing through the two since he was getting extra utensils. Vlad was holding a giant spoon on his hand. The spoon was as long as his arm!

“Vlad!”, Alex called out.

Vlad instantly noticed Alex and approached him, strangely still carrying the spoon on his arm.

“What is it?”, Vlad asked, staring at Bruno who was keeping his distance away from Vlad.

“Oh, Bruno was just wondering what was going on among the Team Toxic members”, Alex answered.

Once Vlad heard that, he looked like he saw something monstrous appear in front of him. Vlad sweated, shooting his pupils

through the room and then excused, “On second thought: I got to take this spoon thing to Paul right now!”. Vlad chuckled, then drove himself away from the duo. Alex dropped his jaws. Bruno only stared at Vlad, trying his best to take his looks away from him.

Alex was left dried the same way Bruno always did. Alex’s eyes twitched while yelling, “Are you kidding me?”. “Told you”, Bruno scoffed in the mere background. Bruno’s left arm lodged on top of the chair’s backrest, forming some sort of angle.

“But I wonder why they’re keeping this a secret…”, Bruno added. Alex turned his face to Bruno. “Whatever it is, it has to be dangerous or upsetting to anyone. Either way, I believe you’re not the problem, Bruno”, Alex assured. Bruno grinned, pulling his arm away from the backrest. “Thanks for telling me, Alex”, Bruno said. Bruno’s main worries are if he is the problem or if he did anything wrong. Perhaps what Alex said is true—which it is.

Suddenly, Alex remembered something he heard a while ago. “Oh right. Aster told me yesterday that he and Blossom saw some man on the beach lying on the shores”, Alex remembered.

Bruno got electrocuted. His head buzzed through him as soon as he heard that from Alex. “They saw a WHAT!?”, Bruno yelled. Everyone in the class glared at him. Bruno gulped and faked a smile at everyone. “It’s true. Maybe that’s the secret they were hiding? Maybe the man is planning something—who knows?”, Alex asked.

Bruno didn’t hear much of what Alex said. Bruno was just in a frozen state during the whole debacle. Perhaps he just found out the reason why. Finally. After all this time. He got to know the probable truth.

During the actual cooking period, Mr. Munz was watching as the students bake out delicious Nutella-filled cookies. Who doesn’t love Nutella-filled cookies? Other than someone with nut allergies, that is.

Mr. Munz saw Bruno baking and waiting for the oven to cook up the cookies. Mr. Munz approached Bruno and said, “Ah, Bruno. I heard that you’re a part of that toxic team now”. Bruno’s face froze, only his eyes moving above to see Mr. Munz’s huge face departing away from his massive stomach. “Alright, I know. Vlad is a part of the team too”, Bruno moaned, trying to avoid a conversation with the teacher. Mr. Munz had a mischievous grin.

“Well, ever since you joined and the team and I heard you talk about Aster and Blossom”, Mr. Munz hinted. Apparently, he knew about Aster and Blossom because he was also teaching their classes and he knew them very well. As well as their classmates, maybe even more. “Would you mind if you mix milk and orange juice?”, Mr. Munz asked. Bruno somehow turned into a statue. “Milk… and… orange juice?”, Bruno asked.

The students flinched at the idea of that. “Why!?”, Bruno asked even further. Mr. Munz chuckled. “I heard that Aster hates orange juice because of some event that happened between him and Vlad”, Mr. Munz said. Vlad froze just like Bruno. “Who told him?”, Vlad asked. Paul shrugged beside him. “And Blossom is lactose intolerant”, Mr. Munz added.

Mr. Munz didn’t continue forward, only subtly hinting that he wants to do something to those two. Bruno gulped, then thought of the opportunity to get back at the two for not telling him the truth. “Fine. Can I keep some of it?”, Bruno asked. Mr. Munz nodded. “Of course!”, he replied. Bruno chuckled maliciously, then went full-on maniac laughing. Everyone was just looking at Bruno, confused.

When everyone was done with baking and eating their delicious or overbaked cookies, the doors opened nearly wide. Soon, the door revealed Mercury and Kyanide running into the scene, with Kyanide carrying a plastic bag full of something. They approached Mr. Munz,

who was sitting on his table, typing on his laptop. “Hello, Mr. Munz”, Mercury greeted.

Mr. Munz noticed the two, lifting his laptop’s lid downward in order to shut it down. “Hello Mercury and Kyanide. What’s the matter?”, Mr. Munz yawned while asking. Mercury cleared his throat. “I just want to talk to Bruno”, Mercury answered. Mr. Munz approved without saying a word, only a thumbs up while opening his laptop again.

Kyanide and Mercury walked up to Bruno. Kyanide was struggling on the book bag. It was heavy even for a jock-structured guy like Kyanide!

“Uh?”, Bruno stuttered, almost holding in a chuckle or two. Mercury chuckled awkwardly, then frowning and dropped the book bag right on the table.

“Bruno, please take these books”, Mercury requested. Mercury pointed at the books inside the bag. The books were the other editions of the Extraordinary book that Bruno was writing. “You couldn’t find anything?”, Bruno asked. Mercury denied, shaking his head a bit. “I tried my best”, Mercury sighed.

Bruno smiled with determination. “It’s fine then! I can do it. Trust me”, Bruno assured. Mercury had a soft smile while Kyanide seemed bored at the moment. He wanted to get away from this and sleep in class like he always does. “I finally don’t get to carry those weights”, Kyanide said with a sarcastic face.

Mercury snickered. Mercury then pulled Kyanide by the arm as he walked back out of the door. Mercury almost slipped. Luckily, he didn’t. The two didn’t even say goodbye to Bruno, but they usually don’t to anyone.

Bruno looked at the book. There was an odd spark that came from the book. It’s almost like the book is spiritually talking to Bruno. It’s almost like Bruno actually wrote those books…

When he read the author's name… it wrote…

"BRUNO RAY".

Alex watched as Bruno unfolds one of the books—Book 4—and read through it all. Bruno knew at that moment that he must investigate it, for he was the one who actually wrote it. How didn't he know it in the first place though? It truly seemed like a paradox. A real paradox.

Chapter 10
The Breakdown

At night, a party was held to celebrate Robin's birthday. Robin is a student of Class 1, so he is naturally well-liked just like his classmates. The party was full of lights. Funk and electric music were playing during the celebration. And most of all: the cake was probably the best cake Robin has ever eaten—or anyone! It was a huge chocolate cake decorated in strawberries, blueberries, and any kind of berry, really.

Everyone was invited, even some of the teachers were. Of course, in their typical fashion, most of the teachers didn't even go. The only ones who did go were Mr. Munz, Mr. Adams, and the homeroom teachers. The rest were too busy.

Even Mr. Spin went. This is because Mr. Spin promised to himself that he'd make an effort to celebrate all of his pupil's birthdays. He loves everyone in the school in that way, which makes him likeable, yet still scary at the same time.

The night was truly a great night, even if it was a school one.

After the party, the Team Toxic members went back to their room just to check on the man. He was always supposed to stay in the room. He would get his entertainment and meals from the TV and prepared food left in the room's fridge.

Vlad opened the door. All 7 of them jumped on their beds and chairs in unison. The night sure was fun—but it was also tiring. "What a night", Ivon huffed. Laurel yawned. She was stuffed by the food. "You said it~", Laurel sung. Laurel suddenly fell asleep. Everyone watched her as she did so. Ivon sighed with a smile and a shaking head. "Typical", Ivon smiled. Ivon lifted up Laurel and held her on the

shoulder, lying asleep. “I and Laurel will get back home. You guys should check on that guy”, Ivon announced. Ivon, with Laurel on his shoulder, got out of the room, oddly not growing tired as much as his friends.

“Right!”, Mercury exclaimed. Mercury and the others approached the bed slowly. Aster shook what looks to be the man. “Wake up”, Aster said. The shaking stopped. Aster sighed deeply. “Just like Vlad during Math class…”, he said. Vlad heard it and yelled, “Hey!”. Blossom snickered in the background, so did the others.

After a lot of shaking, Aster gave up and unraveled the blanket, trying to yell at the man. However, that got stopped as the blanket didn’t reveal a man. The blanket didn’t reveal anything. The blanket only revealed the mattress, pillows and bed cover. There was no man.

Everyone gasped together. “Where did he just go?”, Aster asked, as surprised as the others. Kyanide walked up to the window, not hoping much. He only hoped seeing the forest view. To his surprise, Kyanide didn’t only see that, but he also saw the window being broken into pieces. The only remains are the corner glasses.

“Hey, maybe I know where he went!”, Kyanide exclaimed, pointing at the shattered window. Everyone came up to the window. Mercury examined how much the window has been broken. He measured it up to the normal height and general size of a man. “He must’ve escaped”, Mercury concluded.

While Mercury was calculating, Blossom spotted that some pictures of Bruno, Blossom and Aster were just… there. Some pictures of the Team Toxic members seemingly older also appeared. “Is it just me seeing things or are there pictures of us as adults?”, Blossom asked. Everyone turned their heads to see that.

Aster took the pictures. “I’ll be keeping it!”, he declared. Mercury sighed. “And it looks like he’s already getting out for the school. Looks like he wasn’t lying when he told me that”, Mercury

said. Everyone frowned and were upset. They were wondering what could this mean for the following day… and importantly for Bruno. The main reason why they were keeping the man a secret is because of how much the man was talking about Bruno. They thought that the man would harm Bruno in one way or another.

It looks like their efforts were really in vain.

In the suburbs, or Frank Street (the street Bruno was living in), the houses were quiet. No lights were even being emitted from the windows since everyone was asleep. It was 12:36 AM. Bruno was as asleep as his house was. Dreaming and snoring was all that Bruno's family (the Ray Family) did.

Bruno's house had an eave on it. The eave indicates the location of the attic. The eave had a stringing design on the edge of it. The eave extends fairly far from the house, which makes it easier for something flying to get caught standing on it. Not only flying things, but anything that falls from the sky.

One of those things is the man. The man that Team Toxic found was climbing the tree on the house's backyard. The tree branched out far enough that it reached the eave of the house. The window on the wall next to the eave was the window to Bruno's room. The dead of the night was truly silent until then.

The man creeped up to the edge of the window.

Subtle whispers came to the man's ears, nagging him about the past… whatever that means. The same voices told him not to do this, but the man had to. He really felt like he was obligated to.

The man reached into the window. His hands sweating from the swear produced from the fake whispers.

The man finally got through the window. Once he slid it up, he led his leg out of the outside world, and into the house. His head and torso followed. He was almost breathless once he saw Bruno sleeping

on his sport-related bed. The man felt… something familiar arousing him.

Suddenly, tip-toes clattered through the door. Someone was coming into the room. It must be Bruno's parents. Apparently, they were the only people in the neighborhood who were awake. It was the same thing for every night. Every night, Mr. Ray would check on Bruno just in case anything happens to his son. It seems like something did.

Once the man heard the footsteps, he instantly pushed himself away from the house.

The man jumped away from the eave, but not before shutting the window. He luckily jumped as soon as Mr. Ray came. However, Mr. Ray got to hear the window shut. He didn't think much of it once he saw the window. He thought he was hallucinating. It isn't out of the ordinary for night hallucinations after all.

The man hid behind the tree. He kept gasping for air.

Inhale, exhale,

inhale, exhale.

All the man could think of were if he really got caught or not and how he saw Bruno.

"He really is… alive here…", the man thought to himself.

The man heard the door creak as it closed.

The man took one last peak at Bruno before he jumped from tree to tree in the neighborhood, eventually getting out of the last tree and getting back to the hangout. Of course, he didn't get away with this unnoticed. He didn't know that Team Toxic knew that he was gone.

The man stayed awake in the hangout, unable to stop thinking about Bruno. The man rose from the bed and stepped towards the Leader's Desk.

The man looked at a picture of the original 7 Team Toxic members and started tearing up in sorrow and grief about something.

The next day was a fairly normal day—at least for the school. Everyone got out of their buses and from the gate and walked to their classrooms. For older kids, the process takes a bit longer. Floor 8 is considered far from the grounds, which is why the ideas of elevators have been proposed. While it is said that the process of building an elevator is going into play, nobody has actually saw anyone building an elevator. At least, until a week before any of this has even happened. By then, everyone saw some construction workers working on something.

Everyone in Class 2 were seated and kept being quiet as buttons. This is unusual since the class is known for being quite noisy in the morning. Class 4 is even worse though. Everyone in the class would challenge each other to a vicious fight in the morning, so things would get noisy **and** destructive!

Nadia kept whispering some things she overheard from the girls of Class 3. Bruno was eavesdropping what Nadia was saying. “Nadia?”, Bruno asked. Nadia bit her tongue and stared at Bruno. “What?”, Nadia asked. Bruno stared back at Nadia, sweating after he realized something. “Never mind”, Bruno denied. Nadia and Bella gave confused looks at Bruno, then looked away.

Bruno thought about it and realized that maybe he should keep his suspicions at bay. After all, none of the things the girls said seemed to be true.

Mrs. Garcia finally came to the class. “Good morning, students!”, Mrs. Garcia greeted. Everyone wished her back a good morning. After Mrs. Garcia took the attendance, she stood up, ready to announce something important. “Students, I have an important announcement to make”, Mrs. Garcia declared. The eager students awaited what she’d say. “Just like how I didn’t come yesterday, Mr. Quaver will be coming. He said that he’ll be busy with outside business before his actual lesson”, Mrs. Garcia announced. Everyone didn’t seem so

surprised. It's pretty much normal that Mr. Quaver would leave the students hanging like this.

Mrs. Garcia took all her stuff and walked out of the classroom. Mr. Quaver and Louise came to the class and made an entrance for themselves. As every teacher did, they introduced themselves and wished the students a good morning. Afterward, the two sent the students to the music room. The music room was wooden in texture and was filled to the brim with instruments and paintings of music notes were plastered all over the wall.

Just like the students would always do, they'd mess around in the room.

One of the few who wasn't messing around was Marlyn. She was practicing her drumming and vocal skills—mostly her vocal skills. Bruno also played the drums. The two were sitting next to each other when they were playing the drums. "Why ya gotta be so mean!", Marlyn sung. Bruno's eyes glittered up.

Once the drums took a backstage for the singing, Bruno and Marlyn sung in a duet. "You, with your switching sides and your wildfire lies and your humiliation. You! Have pointed out my flaws again if I don't already see them", they sung. Marlyn gasped and noticed Bruno was singing along. Then she remembered that Bruno was a massive Taylor Swift fan, in secret of course!

"Someday, I'll be, living in a big ol' city! And all you're ever gonna be is mean!", Bruno sung. Bruno noticed that Marlyn stopped singing and staring at him. Bruno was frozen like a statue in embarrassment.

Bruno was red and blushing. Marlyn had a soft and quiet clap, but a sweet one. "Didn't know you knew that song! But I guess I should since you're a Taylor Swift fan", Marlyn chuckled. Bruno somehow froze even more. "How did you know?", Bruno asked. Marlyn chuckled even more, clinging her arm through Bruno's

shoulder. “It should be obvious since you sang to her most recent song on your birthday”, Marlyn said. Bruno gulped loudly, trying his hardest to keep it a secret. “It’s one of Taylor’s most famous songs now! Come on”, Bruno said. Marlyn snickered. “How would you know?”, Marlyn asked.

Bruno sighed, defeated. He couldn’t keep it to himself anymore. “Fine. I am a Taylor Swift fan. She’s just so amazing!”, Bruno admitted. Marlyn smiled as she finally saw Bruno spit it out.

“I know she is. Hey! Want to play You Belong With Me?”, Marlyn asked. Bruno gasped. “Of course! That song is one of my favorites”, Bruno said. Bruno pulled out his guitar and started to play the song. He and Marlyn were singing as a duet.

Bruno felt like he made a new friend. Perhaps he couldn’t have kept his favorite singer as a secret! “You know, Jasmine loves Taylor Swift too”, Marlyn whispered while Bruno was singing. Marlyn winked and Bruno snickered, getting back to singing again.

After the “performance”, the room got a knock on the door. Once Mr. Quaver opened the door, it revealed Mr. Gregory standing right in front of it. Mr. Quaver knew this would be bad news—or at the very least, the students would get in trouble.

“Why hello, Mr. Gregory. What shall be the matter?”, Mr. Quaver asked. Louise noticed in the background and gasped, almost losing his breath. The students stayed uniform in their seats and played the instruments they respectively wanted.

Mr. Gregory smiled, seemingly deviously. “It’s something important”, Mr. Gregory said. His smile turned into a scowl while he was saying that. The students all gasped together. “What is it?”, Renard asked. Mr. Gregory turned back to look away from the students in order to announce the news.

“Someone dangerous is coming to our school”, Mr. Gregory announced. Mr. Quaver gasped, but Louise didn’t. He knew about

what Team Toxic has been telling the staff members, though it is surprising that it reached to Mr. Gregory. “You mean THAT mysterious man those toxic goons were gabbing on about, RIGHT?”, Louise yelled. Mr. Gregory grasped his fingers on Louise, saying “Stop yelling at me”. Mr. Gregory let go of Louise’s lips. Now everyone doesn’t even care what Mr. Gregory is about to say next until…

“Besides, the news came from the words of the guards. Why would I listen to those people?”, Mr. Gregory added.

Everyone’s face turned to shock. It was true. Finally confirmed to be true. It seems like those toxic people were finally right about something—and that something definitely isn’t good for the school!

The students got closer to Mr. Gregory physically. “You mean… The guy is actually coming!?”, Violet panicked. Mr. Gregory nodded, turning back to everyone else.

“It looks like you all should be prepared. If an event of the man coming goes into fruition, then you all must hide once alarm bells ring. Mr. Munz, your floor leader, will activate it at once”, Mr. Gregory said.

Everyone nodded to the sound of that, mostly because their lives would be at risk if they didn’t. Everyone was afraid… except for the fearless Sheldon. “So what? I can take care of this!”, Sheldon stated with a brash tone.

Sheldon approached the door to look through the window, just to be pushed away by Mr. Gregory. “Don’t be so confident”, Mr. Gregory said. He had a threatening aura. He sort of always does. It’s always daunting to a student, even to those in Class 4. Sheldon shrimped out and got away, remembering what Mr. Gregory could be capable of.

As soon as Mr. Gregory was about to walk out of the music room until…

“Mr. Gregory, Mr. Gregory!”, a woman cried out.

The woman ran to Mr. Gregory and shook him on the shoulder. It was Mrs. Kiara, the guidance counselor. Mrs. Kiara would always help the students on social issues between them and their fellow schoolmates. However, it seems like that day is when Mrs. Kiara really loses herself. She is known as a fearful woman, but not like this.

"What do you mean, madam?", Mr. Gregory questioned. Mrs. Kiara grasped her breath together and wiped away her potential tears. "The man… HAS COME!", she yelled. The students froze like statues in the background. Mr. Gregory was just in much of a shock as Mr. Quaver and Louise, which was a lot.

"It's too late, isn't it? The guards were too weak", Mr. Gregory asked in denial. Mrs. Kiara nodded then yelled, "Not only that, but the man had a gun!". The students were even more afraid. Much more afraid than they should actually be… or less.

"Security got fatally injured, but none have died", Mrs. Kiara gripped herself and informed. Mr. Gregory jumped his head and stepped out of the room. "That's good to hear. Let's get inform Mr. Munz before it's too late", Mr. Gregory said. Mrs. Kiara followed Mr. Gregory as the two got to the teacher's office, which is where Mr. Munz stays in.

Meanwhile, Mr. Quaver locked the music room's door with his trusty key that was kept on his pocket. He turned to the students and yelled, "Hide! Hide anywhere! Or else you'll be a victim!". "DO THAT RIGHT NOW!", Louise added.

Strangely nobody commented on how much he was shouting, probably because everyone was in a life-or-death situation at the moment.

Mr. Munz rang the alarm bells. *Ring-a-ding-ding*, the bell whistled. Mr. Munz yelled out like a captain, saying "EVERYONE! GET TO YOUR CLASSES!". Everyone followed the orders since they know that something is wrong if the emergency bells are ringing. Mr. Munz

also hid in the teacher's office along with some of the other teachers. Mr. Munz even locked the doors.

Ms. Sylvia sipped her coffee, finishing it. She turned to a man wearing a collared t-shirt. "Ted, mi amie, cannot you fight les?", Ms. Sylvia asked. Mr. Ted declined that with a head shake. "I can't seem to. The man has a gun for crying out loud! All I have is this stick", Ted replied. "And I don't want to see my son running after me!", he added, almost crying.

Indeed, Mr. Ted is Spencer's dad and the geography teacher.

Finally, the man arrived through the floor's door that came from the stair. His gun was kept on his pocket right in his black pants that has seen better days. The man walked through Floor 8, checking for something.

All the kids and teachers were hiding in the classes, or the teacher's office for the teachers. In Class 2, everyone was hiding under their respective instruments. The girls were statues while the boys were much jumpier.

Sheldon and Riley were both peeping out of the door's window, looking at the man who was just wandering around the floor. "Hm, what's going on there?", Roselynn asked. "Nothing much. The guy is just walking around", Riley answered.

Mr. Quaver was panicking in the background. "Ooh! I sure hope everyone else is fine!", Mr. Quaver whimpered. Louise stared right into Mr. Quaver's eyes. "They're going to be FINE!", Louise assured with a shout of course. Mr. Quaver scoffed that off.

The man kept on yelling random names. Well, it seems random on the surface, but if anyone would listen closely, the man was yelling familiar names. "Vlad. Mercury. Kyanide. Ivon. Laurel. Aster. Blossom. Bruno. Where are all of you?", the man called.

Bruno and Vlad took glances at each other awkwardly, while Alex glared at the two Team Toxic members. Later, it wasn't

only Alex, it was the entire class glaring at the two. Bruno chuckled with a fake smile while Vlad whistled. “What are you all looking at me for? It’s obviously Bruno who’s at fault. I mean, he is a new member”, Vlad blamed. Bruno almost jumped, before realizing that he’s hit the guitar stand that he was sitting behind. Bruno didn’t say a word, only looking furious and looking like he was about to punch Vlad right on the face.

“Where are the others anyways?”, Bruno asked while whispering. Vlad tried to remember, then named out “Ivon and Laurel are in their classes, while everyone else is in Class 1”. Bruno raised his eyebrows. “Even Blossom and Aster?”, Bruno asked. Vlad nodded, then adding on with “They actually have to have an important meeting right now, but we don’t have to go, Bruno”.

Bruno took a peek out of the guitar stand only to find Sheldon and Riley watching outside the door’s windows while everyone was hiding. Bruno soon realized that maybe he’s at fault for yet another dangerous situation again.

Meanwhile, in Class 1, everyone was hiding but under the tables instead of behind or under their instruments. Blossom and Aster were both hiding under the teacher’s table.

Mrs. Delilah approached the duo and decided to confront them. “Mr. Aster and Ms. Blossom! Explain yourselves now!”, Mrs. Delilah yelled. Aster and Blossom both gulped together and smiled. Mercury and Kyanide were watching this, but could only see Mrs. Delilah since Blossom and Aster were under the table and couldn’t be seen.

“We just wanted to see our friends”, Aster said. Mrs. Delilah sighed disappointingly and facepalmed. “I’ll tell your teachers about this, and they’ll be very upset”, Mrs. Delilah threatened. Mrs. Delilah then smiled—having a devious grin. “Unless… You two confront the man”, Mrs. Delilah said.

Aster had a determined face while Blossom was just panicking on the inside. “Fine. At least we know the guy, right Blossom?”, Aster asked. Aster got up, so did Blossom after he asked that. She inhaled and exhaled to calm down. “Yeah… We’ll be fine! He recognizes us”, Blossom agreed.

Aster and Blossom both opened the door and spotted the man approaching the music room as he heard Bruno talking. Aster and Blossom both got into a panic. They turned back just to see the door to Class 1 being locked. Mrs. Delilah was smiling at the two through the window. Aster grunted while Blossom whimpered. It seems like they built some sort of hatred for Mrs. Delilah at that point.

The man noticed the kids and approached them.

Blossom hid away, but Aster wasn’t. Instead, he stomped and stood up tall, even if he was short. “Hey! Calm down!”, Aster yelled. The man shook his head, remembering things. “Oh, Aster and Blossom! I thought you two were absent. Bruno always told me you both were…”, the man chuckled while putting his gun away.

The two breathed out together. Then they realized that the man mentioned Bruno… for the final time! “Do you actually know who Bruno is?”, Aster asked. The man nodded with enthusiasm. “Why, of course! We’ve been childhood friends… until he got away…”, the man sighed. Aster and Blossom glanced at each other, both confused about what the man meant. Anything he said could mean anything, really.

During all of this, Bruno and his classmates were watching what was going on. At that point, everyone in the class came to the conclusion that maybe someone should go out. It should be obvious who will go out.

“Bruno, why don’t you do that job and get out? The guy seems to know you anyways”, Sheldon suggested. Bruno looked at everyone in the class, then sighed out loud. “Fine”, Bruno said in

defeat. Bruno opened the door and glared at everyone, saying “But don’t blame me if I die or something”. Bruno shut the door that somehow locked itself.

Bruno’s classmates were worried for him. Most did remember what happened the last times Bruno was brought into crime scenes like this, but at the same time, they knew they had to do this. Perhaps Bruno could aid in stopping this out of left field attack.

As soon as Bruno left the door, he realized that this really was what the Team Toxic members were hiding all along. It looks like safety is the reason after all.

Bruno approached Aster and Blossom who were left alone by the man. “Guys, what’s going on?”, Bruno asked, almost as panicked as Blossom was. “We were just talking with… oh…”. Aster paused as he realized that he had to admit the truth. He had the guts to do so though, Blossom too.

“Look, to tell the truth: We were avoiding your questions because we had to protect you from the man”, Blossom admitted, gripping Bruno by the shoulder. Bruno sighed, pushing Blossom away. “I already know the truth”, Bruno moaned.

As soon as Bruno was about to walk away, he found that the man was right behind him.

The man pulled the gun right out of his pocket and aimed it right into Bruno. Bruno was sweating out at the time, as anyone should be when they’re held at gunpoint. Bruno squealed, trying to hold his screams back.

Aster and Blossom were in the background, watching all of this happening until Aster yelled out, “Stop!”.

The man noticed Aster behind Bruno. Bruno made way so the man could see them. “Aster, Blossom, get away from the boy!”, the man yelled. “It’s Bruno!”, Blossom answered. The man gasped, staring at

Bruno until he realized that it's him. He froze, dropped his gun in the process. "THAT'S NOT BRUNO!", he screamed soon after.

Once he did that, everyone watched this happen through their door's window, knowing that the man's trotting was stopped by the kids.

The man picked up his gun again, more furious than ever. "HE CAN'T BE BRUNO!", the man screamed again in denial. The man started to shoot out pistol after pistol at the three. They luckily kept dodging the bullets and running downstairs. The man chased all the three through the staircases.

The Class 2 students looked at each other, afraid of what was going to happen to Bruno. They seem to have regretted what they just did. They should've just remembered what happened to Bruno in the past before focusing on the disaster that was going on in the present.

It's not only Class 2 at that point. Everyone was afraid for the kids, even if they're Team Toxic members.

The three kids ran through floor after floor, staircase after staircase. It's a surprise none of them tripped at any point.

Eventually, they reached Floor 1, the floor that contains all the first graders. Just like all the other grades, Grade 1 students hid in their classes in fear. They watched as the man chased the kids. Bruno, Blossom and Aster then all tripped on the wet floor.

Slip! Trip!

They fell right onto the principal's office!

Mr. Spin was hiding behind his table like anyone did at the time. He was shocked once he saw the students cram into the room, uninvited. "Kids?", Mr. Spin asked. Bruno gasped. He got up, almost falling down in the process. He walked to Mr. Spin and begged him by saying "Mr. Spin, sir! Help us fight against that man!".

Mr. Spin's face turned to terror once the man stepped right into the room. "Aster, Blossom… I said you should get away from the boy!", he demanded. The kids squeaked and ran away, hiding behind the table. Mr. Spin stomped with his toes. Suddenly, the man trembled in fear. The man then fell onto the ground, looking like a coward. He was clenching his fists in defeat.

"Mr. Spin, sir…", the man whispered.

Mr. Spin flinched himself. The kids looked at the man from behind Mr. Spin, all confused. "Do I know you?", Mr. Spin asked. The man got up, trembling the same way he did beforehand. "Aren't you the principal? The founder of the school?", the man asked. Mr. Spin smiled, then chuckled. "Of course I am! But who are you?", Mr. Spin asked, curious as ever. "I am Moxie", the man answered.

As soon as Moxie said that, Bruno gasped out loud, remembering who he is… however, the Moxie Bruno knows looks… different.

Aster and Blossom noticed Bruno frozen in shock. Bruno kept on shivering. "Bruno?", Blossom asked. The man heard the soft voice emitted from Blossom behind the table. He realized that Bruno is indeed the Bruno he knows.

"Moxie, huh? I've heard of you before", Mr. Spin said. "You were once a member of Class 3, right?", he added. Moxie nodded, affirming that it is true. "I was for two years", Moxie answered.

Bruno got himself away from the table and lifted his arms. "Moxie… is that really you?", Bruno asked. Meanwhile, Aster and Blossom stared at Bruno in plain confusion. It does confirm that they used to know each other though.

"You know that guy?", Aster asked. Bruno affirmed with a nod. "We… used to be childhood friends. But how did you grow up so quickly?", Bruno asked. Moxie sighed. "I thought you were gone. I thought this world was gone. I don't even know how much time

passed", Moxie said. Mr. Spin smiled wide and spun around, harmonizing by himself.

"It looks like we've got another case of alternate world jumping!", Mr. Spin sung. The kids woke up on the inside. Blossom and Aster both got up from the table. "Another case?!", the kids yelled together. Moxie snapped his fingers, now knowing what is going on. "That must be it! The entire world was at stake in my world. I grew up. We grew up, Aster and Blossom… it all makes sense now! I remember everything!", Moxie said. He laughed soon after.

Everyone was confused, silent. Then they laughed alongside Moxie just to fit in with him. Nothing really made sense to anyone except for Bruno and maybe Mr. Spin.

Chapter 11
Temporarily Toxic

The same night, everyone got to the hang out and, well, hung out. Everything was normal and well, though Bruno was still questioning what just happened back at school. Anybody would be if they were going through what he was going through. Meeting with an older version of your childhood friend? Not even a psychic would be prepared for that.

The night started to quiet itself away. People started leaving the hangout—it was a school night after all. While everyone was leaving, Team Toxic called for a meeting at the Team Toxic room. Mercury specifically called his underlings out. Before the members left for the meeting, [redacted] It was supposedly for Aster and Blossom.

Bruno reached the Team Toxic room, which seemed to be like an apartment at that point. Bruno saw all his friends sitting down, surrounding in a circle surrounding the table. Bruno sat beside Blossom, who was sitting near Aster, and Laurel, who won't stop eating some honey cake.

The members' eyes gathered at Moxie's face. Mercury came in front of Moxie. The two were standing on the opposite side of the door, facing towards it.

"Hello Team Toxic! Today, I shall announce another member! I know we just had another about a week ago, but another member won't hurt, right? It was just like this with Aster and Blossom… Laurel and Ivon too!", Mercury declared.

Mercury pulled out a letter that was actually a script for the meeting. Mercury would usually write scripts for meetings. This

is because Mercury would tend to get lost in his thoughts while he's feeling his fury. Even then, Mercury would simply forget what he has to say after a minute!

"Moxie shall be the newest member of Team Toxic! A temporary one too", Mercury announced. Everyone in the team clapped. Moxie was close to shedding out tears. He could cry out a river at that point! "Now, Moxie. Everyone has been having lots of doubts about you—some even asked me questions tonight—so why can't you explain yourself to your newest friends?", Mercury asked.

Moxie nodded, excited to explain everything. He couldn't earlier because he was too caught up on things.

Moxie took the stage and started to talk.

"Thank you, Master Mercury"

"As you might know, I was found lying dead on the beach by Aster and Blossom here. Little did you know that I'd be a significant man in any of your lives, especially for Bruno"

"You see, I was Bruno's childhood friend. We used to know each other since preschool! But how am I an adult? Well. I'm Moxie from the future", Moxie explained.

Everyone gasped, shocked and flabbergasted. Are they dealing with time travel? Alternate universes? It's most probably the latter considering what follows that revelation.

"I know all of you must be confused, but I can explain", Moxie assured.

"I'm probably from another world. Mine is all dark and grim. The sky was red, as red as the blood poured all over the streets of New York. Indeed, a war was brought out into New York in my world. What was the cause of the war? Well, it was nothing other than Bruno's death", Moxie explained.

Everyone gasped once again. Bruno seemed to be more frozen than shocked the others. Bruno wasn't even animated at all!
"You see, Bruno was meant to defeat some evil… I can't remember the name, but the evil killed millions and it isn't human. The evil always planned to murder Bruno for some reason. I knew it all along, ever since I left the school. I tried to warn you so many times Bruno, but you never got any of my letters!"
"The day came. The last day of first term. Bruno got murdered on that day. So did your classmates, Bruno. The only ones left alive were some specific classmates and… the Team Toxic members"
"You all survived by some miracle. I fought against the evil, but got badly injured. Luckily, you all saved me from being dead. I was kept in as a Team Toxic member. As a replacement for Bruno! Because of that I… I…"
"I got close to you two, Blossom and Aster"
"The team and I used to fight the evil's minions, who were our friends but possessed. They were like slaves to the evil. One day… that one faithful day…"
"I had an argument with Aster and Blossom about who'd win against the evil and who gets to go through a portal that we found about a week earlier. That ended in… me going through that portal and into here… I don't even know what happened to the two of you back there", Moxie told.
Everyone was frozen. No motion was made a bit.

After a few minutes, the Team Toxic members gripped themselves into reality. "Let me get this straight: So, you were best friends with Bruno as kids. Afterward the world went crazy and you knew it but it was too late to tell Bruno. Bruno dies then you join the team, finally you went through a portal and came here?", Mercury asked quickly. Moxie nodded to everything as Mercury was asking so.

Kyanide was inhaling and exhaling because he said so much. Moxie shrugged, not caring at all if the story was long or not. Moxie turned to Mercury, ready to ask something under his breath.

Moxie pointed his finger at himself. “So, how will I be a member?”, Moxie asked. Mercury thought hardly about it. He wondered if he should be a permanent member if he never gets home or he should just stay as temporary even if. “Once we find a way to get you back home. If we don’t, then I guess you’ll get to stay”, Mercury answered. Moxie thought about it as hardly as Mercury did. None of the others thought about it. They just enjoyed having two new members after a year.

Mercury clapped his fingers together, bringing the eager members to attention. “Everyone! We’re getting back home”, Mercury announced. Everyone led out sighs of relief. Everyone walked back home except for Mercury and Moxie. “Where do I stay now?”, Moxie asked. Mercury chuckled, leading out a grin soon after. “You get to stay here. Either that or you could stay at Bruno’s”, Mercury answered.

Moxie thought about the decision. After a lot of thinking about how Bruno’s family would react to him, he came to a serviceable conclusion. “I’ll stay here”, Moxie said. Mercury smiled. “Alright!”, Mercury said as he left. He shut the door and turned off the lights, leaving no light into the room. Moxie sighed. He walked up to his bed and laid down. He thought about what just happened that day and maybe even the night before. Moxie sighed, falling asleep from the stress.

The next morning, the bus ride was a normal one. The door for the bus slid open, letting everyone out. Once everyone left, the bus drove away to the unknown. Bruno and Blossom were chuckling since they were talking about Blossom’s pudding accident the night before. Blossom had her chocolate pudding slide down from her table while

she was getting ready to eat and fell right into her mother's skirt. It was funny for Blossom.

Blossom remembered something from the first day of school. Bruno didn't go on the bus with her when the students got home. Amidst of Bruno's laughing, Blossom poked Bruno on the shoulder for a second.

"Bruno, I was wondering about something", Blossom said. Bruno hummed to himself, bringing his attention to Blossom and looked at her face. "I'm listening", Bruno said. "On the first day of school, why didn't you go on the bus when we left to go home?", Blossom asked. Bruno lit up. "Oh, my dad was just having a free day that day! He decided to pick me up. Simple really", Bruno answered. Blossom realizes that Bruno had a stable family and started to frown.

Bruno noticed Blossom's sudden melancholic appearance. "Blossom?", Bruno asked. Blossom shook herself up and stemmed herself. "Sorry!", Blossom excused. She sighed. "Why are you going by bus, by the way?", Bruno suddenly asked. Blossom stared at Bruno, stopping their walk. "I don't want to talk about it", she answered. Bruno tilted his head in confusion, but respected Blossom's wishes anyways.

Bruno approached his class. When he entered, he saw his classmates all talking and having fun in class. Bruno took a deep breath of relief and sat down next to an empty seat that's meant to belong to Alex.

Bruno opened up an empty book that appears to mean nothing. There wasn't even a label in the book. It was a small book too. The main cover of the book isn't a simple brownish-orange color, rather it's a picture of a flower with a purple stigma and hot-pink petals, in front of a purple background.

Bruno opened the book to reveal a book full of questions and activities. Bruno turned to the first page of the book and wrote

his name. *"Glad this book is due for the next semester. Wonder why Mrs. Garcia gave us this early though"*, Bruno thought.

Bruno smiled, shutting the book up. *"Might as well write this on May!"*, he thought more. Bruno plotted his book into his bag. Before he knew it, Alex came in and sat beside Bruno, right next to the wall.

"Checking up on that activity book, huh?", Alex asked. Bruno noticed and nodded. "Yeah! I'm going to do it on May though. Did you do it already?", Bruno asked. Alex pulled it out, then opened a filled-up page. "I did it until Page 53", Alex answered.

Bruno looked at the book in the distance, then smiled awkwardly. Alex chuckled and put his book back into his backpack. Alex tossed his backpack under his table and cropped his legs on top of each other, hanging on the table's stand that was a bit over the floor.

Bruno looked around his table, then noticed something under it. Under the table and on the table's little net, a paper was there. Bruno took it out and found a paper where someone has to match names together. However, it's not any typical matching activity. It was match**making**.

Bruno saw the question; his mouth fell off his face. Then he saw the name of who wrote it. "RENARD FOX", it wrote. Bruno grunted and instantly knew what this meant. Bruno turned the page and saw huge letters, standing for "HAPPY LATE BIRTHDAY, BRUNO". Bruno sighed. "Knew it", he said.

Renard approached Bruno as soon as Renard saw Bruno reading the words behind the paper. "Hey Bruno! Glad you saw the paper", Renard laughed. Bruno stared at Renard with an unruly look. "Did you just put this as soon as you came to the classroom?", Bruno asked.

Renard shut his mouth forcefully, trying to not let the cat out of the bag. Renard even tried to stop himself from snickering. Bruno sighed and facepalmed. Renard snatched the paper, took a pen and then matched the answers.

"Here! Did it for you", Renard said. Bruno rolled his eyes. "Gee, thanks", he sarcastically thanked. Renard walked away. Renard tried his best to took his mind off of what he did. Renard took the paper too.

After some time being spent, someone familiar came into the room—and it wasn't a staff member.

"Greetings, new classmates!", Moxie yelled out while slamming the door shut. Everyone stared at Moxie, remembering what happened the day before.

Bruno smiled with an embarrassed grin. "Hey Moxie!", Bruno chuckled. Bruno ran to Moxie and pulled Moxie by the hand, pulling him to an empty table that was somehow there. Bruno pushed the table next to Bruno's that was on the side of Alex's table that was next to the wall already.

"What are you doing?", Moxie asked. Bruno slid the chair next to the table and answered, "Trying to get you comfy. We have 25 students now, so things will be a bit harder to handle for the rest of us". Moxie frowned and got concerned about Bruno's stress levels.

"You're ok with this, right?", Moxie asked. Bruno's eyes twitched as he stood himself straight. "Of course I am", he answered. "There **is** a reason why I sent you that letter earlier this morning anyways", he added. Moxie sat on his seat. Somehow the chair that's meant to be for 13-year-olds could hold Moxie, an adult, up.

After some time, Ms. Sylvia came since the first lesson is meant to be French. Ms. Sylvia greeted herself, followed by the students greeting her back. Ms. Sylvia wrote in French something that translates to

“Good Morning, 8th Grade!”. Bruno didn’t understand what that meant though. Unlike the other students, Bruno was clueless in French—or any language other than English and Spanish. He wished he was taught Spanish instead of French.

“C'est bon, tout le monde! je ne parlerai pas en français”, Sylvia said. Bruno twisted his eyebrows around in confusion. “What?”, Bruno asked.

Sylvia cleared her throat so Bruno could understand her better. “What I mean is: It’s fine, I will not speak en Francais”, Sylvia sighed. Bruno lit himself up, saying “Oh”.

Bruno didn’t like French periods at all. Not because of Sylvia—Sylvia is a lovely lady in the eyes of Bruno. It’s just that Bruno doesn’t understand the French language at all, nor does he want to learn it. The period itself worries him for the future.

While French isn’t a major subject, things will be hard for him later on in life if he doesn’t excel in French.

What bothers him a lot in the periods is also how everybody speaks French while he doesn’t. They developed the skills to speak French since Grade 7. Since Bruno wasn’t in Grade 7, things were tough for him.

Sylvia erased the writing on the chalkboard and began to write with the white-coated chalk. The writing looked like this:

Aujourd'hui=Today. Demain=Tomorrow. Hier=Yesterday. Futur=Future. Passe=Past

“These are what tou English people call it: Words about, er, time”, Sylvia explained. Sylvia tried her best to remember the word for it but she just couldn’t. The students didn’t help at all. Sylvia continued writing random words, erasing the last few.

Second=Second. Minute=Minute. Heure=Hour. Jour=Day. Mois=Month. Année=Year.

"Have any of tou avis anything?", Sylvia asked. The students took long looks at the chalkboard. Carly raised her hand up into the air. "Carly, mon étudiant, tou can answer", Sylvia said. Carly got herself straight and cleared her throat. "Some of these words are the same as the English ones", Carly answered.

Sylvia clapped as Carly had a narcissistic smile on her face and sat down. "Bon travail!", Sylvia cheered. None of the other students were cheering—mainly because it was Carly who answered the question. The students have some sort of animosity towards Carly

Sylvia wiped the chalk away from the board. Before she knew it, a man appeared in front of her eyes, already in the classroom. "Hello, Sylvia", the man greeted. Sylvia took her eyes away from the board and to the man—who was actually Moxie. Sylvia jumped in fear.

"Oh my! Who are tou?", Sylvia asked, flinching her body away from Moxie. Moxie chuckled, scratching his head a bit. "I'm Moxie, a new student here", Moxie explained, trying his best to take his alternate world matters away from Sylvia. "Vraiment? Mrs. Garcia didn't tell moi about that", Sylvia said. Sylvia smiled wide at Moxie, happy to meet a new student.

"What do tou want?", Sylvia asked. Moxie started walking back to his seat. "I just want to introduce myself", Moxie answered. Sylvia was left, puzzled in the background. She continued to write on the chalkboard.

Sylvia wrote some specific questions about specific things, such as the French Revolution to what species of snails do French people eat. Sylvia finally let down the chalk into the table and stood up still, facing the students almost head-on.

"Will any one of tou answer?", Sylvia asked. The students looked at the questions, all collectively confused except for Moxie. "The French revolution…", Moxie whispered. He began to tear up for

some reason. Bruno stared at Moxie, but not at his face. “Moxie?”, Sylvia asked. Moxie raised his hand once she said his name. “Ms. Sylvia, I’ve got an answer!”, Moxie announced.

Sylvia squealed in excitement and gripped up her chalk. “For what?”, Sylvia asked, raising the chalkboard exaltedly to the questions. “About the French Revolution”, Moxie responded. Sylvia looked at it and read, “What is the French Revolution?”.

“The French Revolution is the time period where changes in rules were being put into play in France. Lots of things happened in the revolution. Ah. That revolution reminds me of the revolution that was going on back in my home”, Moxie explained.

Everyone stared at Moxie with a silent face. “What?”, Maverick asked with a bit of a comic tone. Moxie gulped; a bit embarrassed. “How a-about someone else answers?”, Moxie chuckled. Sylvia chuckled alongside Moxie. “Oui! Who else wants to answer?”, Sylvia asked. The class was silent. There weren’t any hands raised. Sylvia sighed, realizing that finding someone who was eager to answer the questions was going to be a hard task.

Thankfully, the lesson went smoothly soon after. However, the main problem was that Moxie… kept being emotional for some reason. Either that or he’d just answer questions that nobody would know any answers to.

“The farmers planted wine!”
“France is a republic country!”
“The French language uses Latin alphabets!”
“The Eiffel Tower can’t be photographed at night!”,
Moxie kept saying.

“Laurel used to eat those snails! So did Kyanide…”, Moxie oddly cried to. Everyone was abundantly confused at that point. The students would even love to answer but Moxie kept on stealing the

show. “Who the heck is Laurel?”, Mandy asked with her raspy voice. Moxie blinked for a moment, then went crazy. “She’s a member of Team Toxic, isn’t she!? In this world at least”, Moxie said. Everyone stared at him. Bruno was chuckling, feeling uncomfortable about this situation.

Sylvia sat down in the teacher’s table once the last question was answered. She sighed out loud and rang up her phone. She dialed up Mrs. Garcia’s number and called her.

“Ring-a-rang-a-rang-a-rang”, the phone whistled.

The students saw Sylvia calling Mrs. Garcia. They sat on their seats, frozen. The call picked up. “Hello?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Sylvia cleared her throat. She started speaking in French. “Mrs. Garcia, tes élèves commencent à devenir fous. Surtout l'homme près de Bruno”, she told Mrs. Garcia. Mrs. Garcia had a confused tone and started blurting out confused whimpers.

“Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire par "l'homme près de Bruno"? Y a-t-il... quelqu'un qui le cherche?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Sylvia shook her head no, then looking at Moxie in the distance talking to Bruno. “Non. Il y a un homme qui s'appelle Moxie dans ta classe”, Sylvia answered. Mrs. Garcia realized what she meant. “Oh. Tu veux dire le nouvel étudiant? Oui, il y a un nouvel élève dans la classe. Bruno l'a fait venir temporairement jusqu'à son retour à la maison”, Mrs. Garcia explained. “Rentre à la maison?”, Sylvia asked, confused. “Moxie n'est pas de ce monde, du moins c'est ce que Bruno m'a dit hier soir”, Mrs. Garcia answered. Sylvia took another glance at Moxie and whispered, “Je vois...”. Sylvia hung up the call and looked down at her paper, wondering what this could mean.

Chapter 12
Swampy Love

Break was a weird period that day. Everyone in Class 2 were doing their usual things, but Bruno wasn't. Bruno was hanging out with the Team Toxic members with the newest member, Moxie. Moxie stuck out like a sore thumb when next to the team. Moxie was tall and had a broken-up look to him. His shirt was nearly torn, so were his pants. His cap was a damaged version of Bruno's cap. Nonetheless, the team still accepted him, mainly because they had to.

Right beside Team Toxic were the Class 2 girls. Well, all of them excluding Mandy, Carly and Sarah. There were Nadia, Bella, Roselynn, Violet and Winnie. They were hanging out in front of the bathroom, laughing and having fun.

"Ya know Violet. It is a bit funky that yer not with Riley today", Winnie suddenly said with her country accent. Bella nodded, saying "True!". Violet looked at all her friends. It was true. Violet would always hang out with Riley, which is why so many even put them together in the first place. "I just don't want to today. I want to spend time with you girls today!", Violet answered. The girls all giggled and smiled.

The girls started to get into the bathroom and played around with the water. They surprisingly didn't get caught. They eventually got out into the field. Violet didn't follow them though. This was because Violet wanted to go to the bathroom. After taking her time in the bathroom, Violet got out of the door then got tackled by someone.

Violet opened her eyes and saw a boy that was a senior. His name is Ivy. He's well-known in the school, mainly because he was a ruthless

guy. Ivy was a bully and a big bad one at that. If anyone encounters him, then they'll be sure to encounter something terrible.

Violet squeaked, being scared. "I-Ivy! Eek!", she cried. Ivy chuckled. "So you're Violet, aren't you? I'm friends with Riley's cousin—you know, your boyfriend's cousin?", Ivy taunted. Violet pushed him away so she could stand up. Suddenly, she was backed against the wall by Ivy. Nobody was there to see what was going on since everyone was busy with their own problems.

"Riley isn't my boyfriend. He's my b-best friend", Violet whimpered. Violet tried to look behind Ivy and just saw her friends looking confused, looking for her all around the school. Violet whimpered, afraid of what Ivy will do to her. "D-don't hurt me!", Violet cried. Ivy laughed. "Why not? Don't you know I get pleasure from this?", Ivy asked. Violet covered her eyes while he was saying that. Violet was wondering where her classmates were. She knew they'd help her out of this.

Before Ivy could do anything, a familiar voice sprouted out from the distance. "Is it hard to mind your own business?", the voice asked. Violet gasped, while Ivy looked shocked. The two looked behind just to see a very familiar face. A face that's running an entire hangout. A face that came from Class 4. It was Craig.

"Craig!", Violet exclaimed. Ivy left Violet alone. "Heh. So, you're Craig, right? The founder of Craig's Ground. Must be a smart guy", Ivy chuckled. Craig gulped, knowing what he had to deal with. He was sweating too. "Yeah, I am. I'm not bringing seniors in too", Craig responded. "… Because of you", he added.

Ivy rolled his eyes, not caring one bit about that. "What do you want from this girl, anyways?", Ivy asked. Craig pushed Ivy. "It's a rule of Class 2 that we should care about our classmates. Even if that wasn't a rule, I still care about my classmates—at least more than you care about your friends", Craig explained. Ivy huffed, looking away

from Craig. “Fine then. I’ll leave you be. There’s no use pushing away a girl like her anyways”, Ivy grunted while walking away.

“Craig…”, Violet said, staring at Craig. She suddenly saw him with rose-tinted glasses, quite literally. “Don’t mind that. I just wanted to help out a fellow classmate”, Craig responded. Craig seemed embarrassed by what he did.

Craig walked away while Riley rushed in, almost losing his breath. “Violet! Sorry for… coming late”, Riley sighed as he realized what just happened. Violet was so infatuated by Craig that she followed him. Riley watched as Violet walks past him, sighing in sadness.

“Violet”, Riley thought. Riley kept on thinking about what could happen if he came before Craig. He knew some conflict would be made between him and Craig—but he didn’t care much about that. He just wanted Violet back.

The proceeding class was Math class. The class with Albert, an infamously temper-fueled teacher. The class was fairly normal during the period, which is odd to say since Class 2 is always chaotic when it’s Math.

Albert was writing on the board some answers to equations. The students wrote those answers into their notebooks that they already wrote the questions on.

Riley and Violet already finished their answers, since they were correct. Violet was looking down at her book and flipped to the last page of it. She was drawing someone. Riley never saw her draw before, so it surprised him. The person Violet was drawing slowly and slowly got to be more familiar to Riley.

As soon as the hair was drawn, Riley recognized the person. “Craig!?”, he exclaimed. Violet squeaked, then shut his mouth. “Shhh”, Violet hushed. Riley started growling once Violet put her palm away from Riley.

"V-Violet!? What happened to you? You usually draw a Vulpix! Why are you drawing Craig today?", Riley asked. Violet stared at Riley, seemingly confused. Violet tried to act dumb and pretend she never even drew Vulpixes back then. "What do you mean, Riley?", she asked. Riley hissed again, saying "You know what I mean, Violet". Riley gritted his teeth while saying that, not even opening his mouth.

Violet shrugged, ignoring Riley's feelings. Riley then glared at Craig in the distance. Craig was casually talking to Albert as if they were friends. He always does this. Craig would usually explain this as him trying to learn better about Math. He is terrible in Math after all.

Riley ignored Craig soon after, only putting his attention to Violet. Riley sighed deeply and just read a book in order to calm himself down.

Meanwhile, Sid was just making his eyes lurk around the room. He didn't do much. He was passive. Sid's mind was blank too. He couldn't see anything but the beige-coated wall.

Lots of things were going on in the background too. The girls were asking Alex if they could borrow his Science book in order to complete their science homework, in which Alex accepted giving them the book.

Meanwhile, Bruno was trying to decode the Extraordinary books. He even considered continuing to write the book in his mind. Bruno was clearly living in his own world. He was even to his MP3 player, playing "Can't Get You Out Of My Head". That song strangely never got caught into Bruno's mind.

Riley was just watching Craig in the background, becoming a secret stalker of some sort. Something that isn't far off from what another student is doing. A student that was sitting two seats in front of him.

Sid then looked down at his math textbook. The textbook was filled to the brim with words that just looked like gibberish in front of his empty eyes. “Jikangiredesu”, it all sounded in Sid’s brain.

Sid’s bland eyes peeled to Craig, who was showing his math book off to Mr. Albert. Albert stabbed his fingers into his beard, then flossed it around. Albert pointed at something in Craig’s book, making Craig seemingly satisfied, probably because Albert answered Craig’s questions. Sid didn’t know what was going on though.

As soon as Craig leaned himself down to relax on his chair, Sid bit into Craig’s book!

“Yummy”, Sid smiled.

Craig croaked out, yelling out “Sid!”.

Craig pulled his notebook back to himself, but it was too late. Sid already ate a page, the paper stuffing into his already stuffed-out mouth. Craig strangely didn’t look to be shocked, at least as much as someone would be if their classmate ate their page. It looks like the excuse of someone’s dog eating their homework isn’t even relevant anymore.

Mr. Albert was pretty much unlike Craig. Unlike Craig, he isn’t a calm, pleasant and easy-going boy. He is the exact opposite. Mr. Albert would gush out a temper tantrum in even the smallest of things. Before that day, Albert broke Bella’s ruler for no reason other than being furious at Riley working on an important essay.

Mr. Albert slammed his fists into Sid’s table. Sid noticed this and dropped the paper right out of his mouth by dropping his jaw wide. The paper might’ve fallen down because of the fist slamming too. The fist could’ve broken the table!

“Sid! Repay for what you did!”, Mr. Albert yelled out loud. Everyone in the class noticed, all blinking in awkward unison. Sid was embarrassed, as he should be. He whimpered in sadness. “You! You sit with Riley! I’ve been noticing how much trouble he’s being causing, so you two would be perfect together”.

Riley gasped in the background. Violet was as surprised as Riley. “What do you mean by that?”, Riley asked, with a strangely casual tone.

Mr. Albert pulled Sid by the arm and took him to Violet and Riley’s seats. “Violet, sit there”, Albert commanded while pointing at Sid’s chair. “Sid, sit here”, Albert added, thudding on Violet’s chair. Riley gulped, knowing what could this mean to his and Violet’s friendship.

Violet sighed. She got up from her seat and propelled herself to Sid’s seat. Sid happily sat on Violet’s rusty chair. Albert grinned. He walked to the teacher’s table, not caring one bit about the kids’ feelings.

Riley was left in awe and fear as he watched Sid lick the table. The table was lollipop to him.

Across the room, Craig was only relaxing to himself. He believed that the sounds of his classmates’ murmurs are music to his ears. Violet looked at Craig with sweet eyes. In Violet’s fantasy, Craig had hair that was of a knight in shining armor. Craig’s croaks sounded like a magnificent mermaid’s melody.

Violet couldn’t think so straight. Her thoughts were roads going into multiple divergent ways. Violet thought the same way a fangirl would obsess over their favorite celebrity.

Craig didn’t notice Violet’s little eyes full of stars though. He just saw her as a classmate just like any other. Silence was present between the two until Craig broke it.

“Violet, do you know how to solve this?”, Craig asked.

Craig pointed at a question in a worksheet that Albert apparently gave Craig exclusively. Violet stared blankly at it, only having a blink as her motion. “Uh…”, she grunted. Craig chuckled, tossing the worksheet under his table and into the table’s “cabinet”. “It’s fine. I didn’t think anyone would know anyways”, Craig smiled.

Violet chuckled alongside Craig, not even understanding what he actually meant by the question.

Silence went loose again. Violet stared at Craig, thought not in the eyes. Craig slightly lost his angle away from Violet, looking at the chalkboard. “Thank you, by the way”, Violet suddenly said. Craig turned to Violet. “For what?”, he asked. “… For saving me from those bullies back in the break. I don’t know what I would’ve done without you”, Violet explained. Craig smiled after knowing. “It’s nothing. I love to help fellow classmates. It’s been that way since first grade, you know? That’s how I got to make friends with Mr. Flax”, Craig responded.

“Mr. Flax, huh? How was he?”, Violet asked. Violet came from the Brooklyn branch, so she never got to experience the sweet leadership of Mr. Flax. She only heard about him from word of mouth.

“Mr. Flax…. Oh Mr. Flax”, Craig pondered. He led out a croaky and raspy chuckle soon after. He sounded like an old man. Violet’s feeling about speaking with Craig at the moment was funny. The conversation was so slow and personal while everything going on in the background was so fast and action-packed.

“Mr. Flax was a jolly guy. He was sort of like Mr. Spin. Sweet and soft when happy, but an absolute beast when raged. Mr. Flax was also ambitious. He knew what to do almost all the time. That’s why he even became the headteacher. Mr. Quaver was very close to him. So were I and my past classmates. He took a liking to all of us, so much so to the point where we were always awarded “The Best Class of All”. Oh, I’ve still got those pictures on my bedroom wall”, Craig explained with a bit of reminiscing tone to him.

Violet wore a warm smile during all of that.

Meanwhile, Riley watched this happen in the background. He felt dreaded from seeing that. One of his business partners and his

~~girlfriend~~ best friend hanging out and having fun without him? Not in Riley's watch.

"Why...", Riley asked. Sid was biting on a lollipop, ignoring Riley's emotions. "I don't know, but this lollipop sure is tasty!", Sid responded. Riley groaned, faceplanting himself onto his table.

Chapter 13
Utter Darkness

Lunchtime is when the students are free to get hungry, even if they did absolutely nothing for the day prior. Sometimes, students can get crazy over the food they pick and eat. In other times… more wacky shenanigans occur around the cafeteria floor. The latter is what happened that same day.

Team Toxic has a table of their own. It was marked by a black skull drawn on it, symbolizing the toxicity of the members. All the members had black on their clothes, so it only makes sense that the symbol is black. Well, everyone has black in their clothes except for Bruno. He has the opposite: White.

Team Toxic were as chaotic as ever during lunch. As chaotic as they can get. It wasn't that chaotic at first, but things will develop soon after.

Mercury hit his juice box with his spoon as to make way for his toast. "Everyone in Team Toxic", Mercury called to attention. The members dragged their ways to Mercury's mouth.

"Today, I just want to give a warm welcome once again to the newest members, Bruno and Moxie", Mercury announced with a smile. The members clapped in unison. Bruno was blushing while Moxie was feeling soft and happy. The other friend groups of the school were bothered by the clapping.

Mercury got down from his seat and crossed his legs. Kyanide hit his own juice box with his fork and then declared, "FOOD FIGHT!". Mercury was electrocuted to say the least. "Food fight!? But nothing even happened!", Mercury panicked.

Suddenly, a Nutella sandwich was thrown at Mercury. Mercury noticed it, took it out of his shirt and looked around, glancing at the potential suspects while they throw their own filthy food at each other.

"This is all YOUR fault Kevin!", Mercury growled. Kyanide giggled uncomfortably, thinking that this is all just a funny joke. "Oops", he added.

Food was being tossed to everyone in the group, left, right and center. Splash by the juice, squished by the jam and perked by the cereal that the members somehow brought.

It didn't take long for the other students to notice Team Toxic go berserk again. This is nearly everyday for them at this point. They always do ridiculous things like this. One time, Vlad took pillows and did a pillow fight against his classmates in the lunch table. It was fun for them at the time, but after they all faced their consequences, it didn't seem to be so fun.

The food got to all the table and all into the member's clothes. Strangely enough, some of members ate the food that the other threw. Poor janitor had to clean up this mess, the other students thought in the mere background.

Mercury wanted to finish this mess but it was too late. The massive mess was already made!

"STOP THIS NOW!", Mercury yelled.

His fury got to him!

The members and even the other students knew this would mean trouble. Big, big trouble.

Kyanide chuckled awkwardly and approached the frozen and furious Mercury. "Want to see me jump?", Kyanide asked, trying to calm Mercury down. Kyanide jumped high, but not as high as

reaching the roof. That didn't matter to Mercury. How would a trivial jump calm a beast down anyways?

Mercury suddenly took all the plates and lunchboxes and threw it at all 8 members; even Moxie, who didn't participate in this. "If you all stop… THEN I WOULDN'T HAVE GOT MY DEMON OUT!", Mercury shouted. Everyone gulped. They sort of cringed too, but not by a lot. They knew Mercury would know they would be cringing at his "demon" phrases again.

"Can we continue?", Vlad asked. Mercury froze, his pupils dilating out of sight. He sighed in defeat. "Fine…", he sighed. Everyone in the group cheered except for Mercury and Moxie. Moxie was just sitting passively.

They continued to throw food, with no adults even being involved.

Mercury, who didn't want to participate at all, looked at Moxie, who still wasn't participating either.

"Moxie? Why aren't you fighting?", Mercury asked.

"Yeah? I would've expected a guy like you who came from a literal war apocalypse to be fighting in a food war like this!", Kyanide said while eating a tomato.

Moxie sighed. "That's the point. I don't want to relive my world, but that doesn't mean I don't want to go back. I want to protect it and get it back to the way it used to be… the way it is now", he explained.

Everyone frowned together, looking at Moxie with concerned looks on their faces. "And maybe… maybe something will happen if I throw those apples!", Moxie whimpered. Vlad chuckled. "It's not an apple! It's a tomato!", he responded. Moxie shook himself. "Still", he replied. Moxie looked at the ground. Blossom shrugged. "What flows your boat, I guess", she said. Everyone continued their food fight until they got approached by someone……

Bruno and Vlad's classmates!

They approached the team. Winnie was holding up a quarter of a cake on her plate.

When they finally reached the team's table, they stood behind Bruno, prepared to say something. "Hey guys. What do you want?", Bruno asked. Winnie placed the cake on the table. "Ah, we just want to give you some leftover velvet rose chocolate cake from my boyfriend's a—wait, I don't have a boyfriend", Bella acted. Everyone from Class 2 chuckled. "Look, we've just got leftover cake from your birthday party", Renard explained. "So, we thought 'Hey, why don't we give the birthday boys and their friend the leftovers?'", Violet added.

Bruno looked at the cake and remembered his birthday. It was days ago. He couldn't even believe how much happened between his birthday and that day.

Bruno took the cake, Vlad behind him with a smile. "We'll surely take the cake!", Bruno answered. The Class 2 students smiled back, a bit uncomfortably. They walked away soon after, except for Max. Max stayed behind for some reason.

Bruno dragged the cake through the food-filled table and to the center of it. "Who wants cake?", Bruno asked loudly. Kyanide cheered and took a slice. "I'd love to have it!", Kyanide said. Laurel shrieked out loud and took the entire plate. "I WANT TO HAVE IT ALL!", Laurel roared. Everyone in the table laughed.

Moxie was just watching all this happening until he suddenly got a tap on his shoulder. "Hey, Moxie?", a voice asked. It was Max. "Oh, Max. What's the matter?", Moxie asked. Max sighed. "Bruno told me that you're from another world. Is that true?", Max asked.

Moxie looked around the room, then put his palm onto his heart. "It's true…", Moxie admitted. Max squealed but in a… strangely

robotic way. “There’s no shame in it!”, Max answered. “Don’t you know how amazing this discovery truly is?”. Moxie looked around with an uncomfortable face. “No?”, Moxie asked, feeling nothing but confused.

“Moxie. You’re living proof that alternate universes exist. This could mean lots of things for mother!”, Max cheered. Moxie gasped and remembered something. “Max… You’re one of the few who survived in my world”, Moxie said. Max stared at Moxie, confused. Apparently, the only few survivors are some students of Open Book School and a lucky few people in New York. Oddly enough, the war only affects the United States in Moxie’s world, specifically in the east.

Max stared at Moxie. “What happened in your world?”, Max suddenly asked. Moxie sighed. He looked behind at Team Toxic, who were all caught up in their own “childish” antics.

“I’ll explain…”, Moxie said. Moxie soon explained everything with a depressed tone. He didn’t want to remember everything back, but he had to. He had to inform these kids from another universe who he apparently knows.

Eventually, he reached a point where questions are going to be raised. “Who started the destruction precisely?”, Max asked. Moxie tried to recall who, then it snapped to him. “Utter Darkness”, Moxie answered.

Max’s jaw dropped. That name… was weird to him. “Utter Darkness? That name rings a bell…”, Max said. Moxie frowned. “Really? It doesn’t look like Utter Darkness is attacking now”, Moxie said right before the bell rang.

Everyone went back to their classes. Max didn’t get further answers about Utter Darkness other than the fact that it isn’t human and nobody else should know about it or else curiosity will allow people to approach Utter Darkness and empower it.

During Science class, everyone was listening to Mr. Adams lecture about space. It didn't sound like much to most of the students. They've been studying about things like this since first grade after all. Moxie was a bit anxious about the future though. The future being in store for him didn't look so bright, at least for him.

Moxie stared at the chalkboard Mr. Adams kept pointing to. There was a drawing of all the planets in the Solar System. The sun was drawn in the middle. All 8 planets circulating around the sun. Well, one was missing actually. It was Neptune that was missing.

A student, Nadia, chuckled and pointed at the missing spot for Neptune. Mr. Adams chuckled and drew Neptune. "Oops! Almost forgot about silly Neptune! Oh! But did you know that it's the coldest planet and the most recently discovered? It was discovered in 1846", Mr. Adams explained with a chuckle in the beginning.

Moxie sighed, remembering how Team Toxic was in his world. The Solar System reminded him of it. It was an extraordinary and weird feeling inside of him, yearning about the past yet wanting to avoid it.

Bruno noticed Moxie's flinching. "What's wrong?", Bruno whispered. Moxie grasped himself. "I'm just thinking about my world", Moxie answered. Bruno blinked, then looked at a gap in the door that showed some great light. He subtly spots some of the Team Toxic members roaming around the class like they always do. There was a reason why Vlad wasn't in the classroom after all.

Bruno sighed, knowing what he's getting himself into when he joined the team. He just didn't want to see the signs. He was being blind. He should've known. Why did I [redacted]

Bruno, you really shouldn't have done that.

Suddenly, Moxie got called by a student who entered through the door. "Moxie. I need Moxie", a girl called. Moxie got up, showing how tall he is. "I'm here", Moxie declared. The girl gulped, seeing an actual adult sitting in class casually. She was a member of Class 3, named

Mina. She was known as one of the best members of the class in an academic sense. “Mr. Gregory needs you. Let me take you to him”, Mina said. Moxie agreed by nodded, later following her to Mr. Gregory’s office which was a floor under the classroom.

Moxie went up to a door that said “Headteacher’s Office”, though it was more of so Mina who took him there. Once they reach the upmost front of the door, Mina rushed away to her class, leaving Moxie alone.

Moxie knocked on the door as if it was a house, inhabited by some stinking man.

The door creaked open, but nobody could’ve opened it. Despite the weird feeling Moxie had, he continued to take steps towards Mr. Gregory. He was just sitting in his pitch-black seat, becoming less distant and brighter as Moxie came towards it. The door shut closed. Moxie glanced at it before he sat down on a chair in front of Mr. Gregory’s table.

Moxie took a look around the room. He then took a look at Mr. Gregory. Out of fear, he instantly took his pupils away from Mr. Gregory, avoiding any eye contact with him.

Mr. Gregory raised his arm away from a paper he was signing. He drifted the paper off to the side, then crossing his arms and sat straight. “So, you’re Moxie, right? That’s what the students told me”, Mr. Gregory asked.

Moxie swallowed in his throat. He was trembling in the middle of Antarctica, at least, that’s how he felt like at the moment. He felt like his brain couldn’t survive the moment. Nonetheless, he continued on, preparing to spill out a word.

“Yes, I am”, he answered.

Mr. Gregory’s mind flashed before he could think of anything. He took out a folder. A scary-looking one to anyone. Mr. Gregory took out a

mysterious paper out of a part of the folder. The folder wrote “Class 3: CONFIDENTAL”. It clearly meant something, but that ‘something’ was unknown for a moment.

“You’re Moxie Stamin, aren’t you? You were once a member of Class 3 and one of the better students, according to a report made out by Mr. Flax”, Mr. Gregory stated.

“’Affirmative”, Moxie answered, a bit afraid that this might mean something. Thankfully, it didn’t, at least for the moment.

“I see. And how is it possible that you’re an adult? Unless those rumors of you coming from another universe is right…”, Mr. Gregory asked. Moxie’s spirits got up, though not his body. “Yeah! It’s right! I am”, Moxie answered.

Mr. Gregory instantly raised his eyebrow, scaring Moxie into freezing him. Mr. Gregory suddenly laughed like a maniac soon after. Moxie realized something after remembering seeing the “Headteacher’s Office” sign. His headteacher is supposed to be Mr. Flax, not this Mr. Gregory guy.

“Who are you anyways?”, Moxie asked. Mr. Gregory gave a death stare at Moxie, which is inevitable anyways. “I’m Mr. Gregory, successor of Mr. Flax as a headteacher”, Mr. Gregory answered. Moxie grunted. “I knew it. So, you’re Greg Dunkel, aren’t you?”, Moxie asked.

Mr. Gregory’s face lit up, strangely being happy about being caught. Things were certainly getting a bit creepy from there on.

“Oh my god…
Oh my god…
Someone finally knows”,
Mr. Gregory maniacally laughed…

Before anyone knew it, Mr. Gregory dropped the file that he was once holding onto the ground.

Moxie's eyes started to go into a panic, shivering around and around.

"Mr. Gregory Dunkel, what's wrong?", Moxie asked. Mr. Gregory got up, sliding his chair away silently. Mr. Gregory suddenly got his lamp that was on the left side of his desk and threw it at Moxie.

Moxie squealed in fear, backing away into the door. He tried to open the door but couldn't since it was mysteriously locked.

"Explain everything about your world. Or else…", Mr. Gregory commanded. Once he said that, he pulled up a gun out of his pocket and pointed the muzzle at Moxie. Funnily enough, the scene was familiar to Moxie. It's almost like he experienced it before and was experiencing déjà vu while going through this.

"About Utter Darkness?", Moxie asked. Mr. Gregory nodded, ominously not saying anything. Moxie gulped, knowing that this Mr. Gregory knows about his world's Mr. Gregory… and it isn't pretty to say the least.

Moxie almost became breathless as Mr. Gregory has slowly growing shameless. The darkness in the room started to get the best of Moxie as he heard whispers from behind, whispers of children laughing as they go to the bathroom. The innocence of the children can't be tainted if they witness any of this.

Moxie felt like the darkness will devour his soul and soon the world. He felt like he had no choice but to confide to Mr. Gregory. Of course, nobody explicitly told Moxie that he had to be honest about it.

Moxie told everything with the exceptional of Utter Darkness, for he had to keep it a secret. He had no choice. Mr. Gregory showed a bit of a passive aggressive expression to Moxie, but he let Moxie loose anyways.

“Thank you, Greg…”, Moxie thanked. Mr. Gregory led out an obviously fake smile. A smile only a mother can’t tell any differences to compared to a real, genuine smile. “No problem…”, Mr. Gregory responded. Moxie took one last glance at a creepy-looking Mr. Gregory picked up the file while staring at… something. Moxie left for class before anything else could happen between him and Greg.

In the end of the school day, everyone left for the hangout or their homes just like always. The sunset was gorgeous that way. A beautiful mix of pink, purple, blue and orange. It was incredibly fitting for the day… or any day for that matter.

Moxie approached Bruno as he was leaving for the bus to get home. “Hey, Bruno”, Moxie called. Bruno turned his back while on his way to the bus. Moxie jogged to him.

“Moxie? Shouldn’t you be going to the hangout?”, Bruno asked. Moxie chuckled. “I don’t want to today. I want to stay with you for tonight!”, Moxie explained. Bruno grinned, walking up to the huge yellow bus that was fairly empty.

“Come on, then. I don’t think my family will be **that** mad anyways”, Bruno accepted. Moxie squeaked with silence. The two jumped on the bus, leaving the school together.

Moxie looked around at the bus like it’s a poor person viewing a millionaire’s mansion. Moxie was too pumped to even look after himself. “I haven’t been in a bus in ages! The last time I’ve been in one was… the last day of school”, Moxie said. Bruno pat Moxie on the back, willing to comfort his feelings. Bruno knew how much things hurt for Moxie, so he might as well do all of this for him.

The two finally reached Bruno’s simple but cozy house.

The house looked like all the other ones in the suburbs though. A simple, triangular roof with two stories. The first story

being the main living place while the second was filled with bedrooms. The house also has an attic.

The two approached Bruno's bedroom. While doing so, they went past many other doors that led to other rooms. It is unknown to Moxie whether these doors lead to a bedroom or some other type of room though.

Bruno opened his door and it led to them seeing a nicely-decorated, blue-painted room. It was familiar to Moxie. Bruno jumped on his bed full of springs.

"As you might tell: This is my bedroom!", Bruno said.

Moxie looked around curiously. Maybe even cautiously. Moxie suddenly felt something under his feet. He felt like he could've slipped from it. He looked under and it was a broken picture frame of… something. It was a blurry picture.

"What is this?", Moxie asked, lifting up the picture frame. Bruno rose up from the bed, going up to Moxie and looked at the picture. "I've never seen this before. Huh. Just like some other stuff I saw", Bruno scoffed

Moxie's jaw slightly dropped. "What do you mean by that?", Moxie asked. Bruno picked up the picture that Moxie dropped on the ground while feeling shocked. "You see, I've been getting random objects from portals lately, and I have not a single clue what that means", Bruno explained quickly.

Moxie stared at the picture while Bruno was explaining it. It seemed familiar to him. However, he didn't tell Bruno about it, only keeping his silence. Bruno shrugged, giving the picture to the table.

"Let's just hit the hay. I'm exhausted from all these universe shenanigans!", Bruno laughed. He jumped on his bed and fell asleep at an instant.

While Bruno was asleep, Moxie crept up to the picture frame and just stare at it, frozen and all. He knew he saw it before; he just doesn't remember where… unless…

Chapter 14
The One

Next morning, everyone woke up at the same time, just because they had to for school. Bruno got up and noticed that Moxie was just… standing in front of him. Creepily. Moxie was even staring at Bruno.

Bruno squeaked in fear. “Moxie!?”, he exclaimed, jumping out of his bed. Moxie chuckled. “I apologize!”, he said. Bruno sighed, facepalming. “How are mom and dad going to think of this…”, Bruno moaned to himself.

Bruno suddenly jots himself out. “Oh NO! MOM AND DAD!”, Bruno yelled. Moxie put his palm into his mouth, feeling a bit concerned for Bruno.

“It’s fine. I didn’t need to stay here anyways”, Moxie said, almost gaping out of Bruno’s window before realizing it was locked. “No, Moxie! Stay here. I think it’s safer than staying in Craig’s Ground anyways. I mean, that place has no night guards!”, Bruno said. Moxie tilted his head, putting himself away from the window. “How about the one named Sebastian?”, Moxie asked. “What?”, Bruno asked instantly after. Moxie shook his head, then said “Nevermind. Just… Bruno, how are things going to work out?”.

Moxie’s question sort of scared Bruno for some reason.

Bruno suddenly pulled Moxie by the arm and ran downstairs. “Come on, we have no time to waste”, Bruno said, ignoring Moxie’s question just to avoid complicating things.

The two went down the stairs, then through the front door all stealth-like. Nobody was even home. Moxie hid in the bushes while Bruno stood outside, waiting for his brother.

Piper eventually got out of the door and they went to the bus. Moxie was kept as a scarlet letter, of course.

Moxie sat next to Bruno and Blossom, barely squeezing in. Blossom squealed in utter excitement She was too excited to even keep anything in.

“Oh Moxie! I’m just so glad we could give you a better life”, Blossom said. Moxie sighed, knowing that he won’t last in this world, nor in his own. “A better life for me is a life where I can fight for justice… this world, isn’t it”, Moxie responded. Blossom frowned right after hearing those words out of Moxie’s mouth.

The seat squeaked as Blossom got a grip on her body from the cramped seat. “Where is Moxie in this world anyways?”, Moxie asked Bruno. Bruno started to remember, saying “The last time I saw him was when I was 5… He moved to Manhattan because his parents died…”.

Moxie rubbed his chin, intrigued by this. “So, it’s just like how things ended between the two of us in my world… at least until the age you’re at”, Moxie said. He sighed soon after. “I remember how devastated I felt when I saw my parent’s corpses…”, Moxie sighed.

Bruno and Blossom blinked together, then glanced at each other. Moxie stared at the window, hoping to get back home somehow, in some way.

Time passes, so did the day.

Lessons were being taught.

Students were taunting each other.

Teachers spouting out nonsense.

And most of all… sudden chemical reactions occur in the science lab.

Indeed, it is a normal occurrence in the school. There is a reason why the science lab is even called “Explosive Lab”. Somehow, students always find a way how to kill each other by causing

explosions or just doing something idiotic. Maybe from a baking soda to sodium reaction there, maybe a burn another.

Class 2 is no exceptional from this. Winnie is infamous with these sorts of situations though. She is described to a curious cat, after all. Anything she sees, she has to touch it, even if it is a red button.

It was science class for Class 2. They were taken to the science lab that day. They had to wear lab coats since Mr. Adams asked them to. Their lab coats were like a scientist's. They all looked like little scientists, going to experiment on something.

"Ok everyone! Now you just have to combine these elements and see the result", Mr. Adams requested, pointing at a paper he was holding up saying "Magnesium and Sulfur". Everyone nodded, abiding by the request. They started to find the element and mix them together. Of course, some fights were breaking on the spot. Nobody could decide who should have the 14 bottles after all.

Thankfully, everyone got the chance to mix those elements. Things were turning out fairly well, at least as well as an average Class 2 lesson. It's always chaotic compared to the other classes, probably because everyone has a conflicting personality whilst the students in other classes share personalities.

Winnie, being the person that she is, looked around the lab since she was done. The only other people who are done were Max, Spencer, Sheldon, Nadia, Alex and Renard. Everyone else either were having a hard time or they were one of the few who were fighting over the bottles.

Winnie suddenly saw a shiny object. It was a bottle of baking soda and an even smaller bottle of vinegar. The vinegar smelled funny once Winnie twisted the bottle cap to open it. The baking soda wasn't too notable though. Winnie remembered that

vinegar and baking soda would mean that an explosion would be made, like those volcanoes in a science fair. She had a malicious smile on her face.

Winnie touched the baking soda with her finger and felt weird. Winnie, being a bit scared that this might be dangerous at the same time, turned back to see her classmates telling the teacher about the experiment. Winnie shrugged it off and took the bottles to her seat.

Violet, who was sitting next to her, stared at the bottle and sort of examined it. “Winnie, what’s that?”, Violet asked. Winnie smiled and, without saying any words, showed the two bottles to Violet. Violet gasped, but in a bit of a joyous way. Before Violet could say anything, Winnie squealed in excitement. “I can’t wait to remake those gosh darn volcanoes! Hoo wee!”, Winnie said.

Winnie took the bottles and a bowl from the cabinet. The surrounding students noticed her. “Winnie, in what sense of the word are you doing?”, Roselynn asked with her posh accent. Winnie snorted.

Winnie showed off the bottles. “’Ere is the bakin’ soda and that vinegar!”, Winnie said. Roselynn gasped. “Won’t that cause an explosion?”, she asked. Winnie spit out, forming a raspberry. “It’ll be fine”, Winnie assured. Winnie looked at her other side, which was just Violet. Riley wasn’t there since he had gone off to the bathroom.

Winnie plotted in the bowl and poured the baking soda into the bowl. Once the vinegar bottle spit out a single drop of vinegar into the bowl, though…

The bowl started fizzling up, creating countless bubbles. Not the fun kind of bubbles though, it’s the kind that comes from boiling. Winnie started to panic on the inside. Suddenly…

Boom!

The contents of the bowl burst!

The surrounding students all jumped out of the way. However, Violet was frozen in place. Luckily, Craig pulled her away from it since he was sitting just next to her, after Riley.

Violet kept on gasping for breath after that. Her gasps were intense. Very intense. “That was… close…”, Violet whispered to herself. Craig croaked, saying “Sure was”.

Once Violet heard that, she turned her head up to see Craig’s rowdy-looking face. Violet squeaked, turning back, then blushing. “C-Craig!”, she stuttered. “Anything wrong?”, Craig asked. Violet chuckled once Craig asked that. “No…”, she smiled.

Riley rushed in, slamming the door open. “I heard an explosion, so—“. Riley stopped as he saw Violet staring at Craig with romantic eyes. Riley’s eyes twitched. He couldn’t believe it at that moment.

While that was going on, Mr. Adams approached Winnie with hard stomps. Mr. Adams’ arms crossed around each other. “Winnie Williams! How many times did I have to warn you!?”, Mr. Adams yelled. Winnie squeaked, stepping away from Adam, who was on the left side of him.

“S-Sorrah Mr. Adams! I’ll fix this!”, Winnie apologized.

Suddenly, Mr. Adams went from a loud scowl to a soft and typical smile from Mr. Adams. He somehow just went from being an upset parent to a joyous friend.

“Well, everyone! From now out, look out for each other once someone takes their mixing too far!”, Mr. Adams announced.

Everyone nodded in agreement. They continue the lesson while Riley walked to his chair, mad as ever at Violet. Violet didn’t notice though. She only kept her blissful thought train going.

"Oh Craig… Craig was amazing!", Violet swooned. That was one of the first few things Violet said about Craig among the many other.

"He saved my life from my friend's explosive chemical reaction!", Violet sung.

"Sodium Chloride is like me and Craig together…", Violet said.

Riley sighed. *"How about her and I?"*, he thought.

The period went on. Violet won't shut up about Craig. Luckily, no more chemical explosions happened after that. Still, Riley felt some sort of regret that he didn't save Violet but it was his "business partner", Craig.

*"I **so** will get Craig after school… maybe even ruin the hangout in some way! I mean, after **all** we've gone through for the past month, he's doing **this** in return!"*, Riley ruminated in his mind.

Violet ignored Riley's obvious anger. It was clear in his face that he truly was an upset stomach after having an oily meal.

Spencer came up to break up the cold silence between them, though more of so to borrow something. "Riley, would you mind if I borrow one of your pencils? I forgot mine in the class", Spencer whispered to ask.

Riley stopped gritting his teeth as he looked at Spencer towering over him. Riley smiled, being the first time in a long time that he did. "Of course", Riley replied. Riley took a pencil out of his pouch. While he was searching for his pencil that was stuck in a large amount of other stationary, Spencer stared at Violet, who was just staring at Craig on the other side of Riley.

"Violet?", Spencer asked. Violet snapped out of being in a trans-like state, watching Craig. "Oh, hey Spencer", Violet answered. "I've been noticing that you're being more attracted to Craig since yesterday", Spencer said. Violet tilted her head in complete confusion.

“What do you mean?”, Violet asked. “You keep on staring at him, and you were excited when you sat next to him during Math class yesterday”, Spencer explained.

Violet blinked with a blank face, then laughed, “You’re being silly!”. Spencer sighed, glanced at an upset Riley, then walked away as he took the pencil. Spencer knows what’s going on is wrong, but he can’t pinpoint what it exactly knows. All he knows is that something’s going on between the two.

After school, everyone went to the hangout, as usual. The hangout that day was like any other. Not many notable things really happened, other than the group center being crowded. There weren’t any reasons as to why though.

All the groups were in their tables. Some of those tables were huge. The Noble Students were actually the biggest. There were 11 seats for the 11 members. The Noble Students are basically a group of the best students of the whole grade. The group is also dubbed “The Star Students”, but Noble Students is the official name.

Bruno, like he should be, is a part of Team Toxic. He missed it when the Sunnys existed, but that team was long gone anyways. He even said it himself on his birthday.

Team Toxic were playing with Pokémon toys that Bruno brought to the occasion. They were playing pretend as if they’re the Pokémon the toys are. They’re all even Poison-type, which is intentional by Bruno. The only exception is a Pikachu toy. They were pretending that they’re going on an amazing quest to save a princess from danger together, the Three Musketeers style.

Bruno was a Pikachu, Vlad was a Zubat, Mercury was a Stunky, Kyanide was a Koffing, Aster was a Skorupi, Blossom was an Oddish, Laurel was an Ekans and Ivon was a Gastly.

"Roar! I'm a Koffing!", Kyanide imitated. Vlad hissed, saying "AND I'M ZUBAT!". Bruno giggled. "That's not how Zubat sound like!", he said. Vlad giggled hysterically

In the background, a group notorious for eavesdropping stares at Team Toxic talking. It was First Girls, or the Gossip Girls as Class 1 calls them. Like their name suggests, they're well-known for how much drama they dig themselves into. They always tend to put their nose into someone else's privacy for no apparent reason.

Team Toxic eventually stops playing and started to talk to each other, but not as a group. Rather, as just pairs or trios. Bruno was left alone. Vlad was talking to Kyanide and Mercury after all. Bruno turned his head to Ivon and Laurel, then to Aster and Blossom. Since Ivon and Laurel seem reserved and the other three were "too much" for him, he just pushed his chair towards Aster and started a conversation.

"Hey. How's life?", Bruno asked. Aster stared at Bruno, feeling a bit awkward. "Fine", Aster answered. Bruno remembered something notable about Aster that he thought would be appropriate. Same for Blossom. "Hey, Aster. Aren't you from the Philippines? And aren't you from Japan, Blossom?", Bruno asked. Aster and Blossom stared at Bruno, as if he said something utterly offensive.

Before they could say anything else though, footsteps were fluttering to the three's ears.

"Hey foreigners", a member called. Aster rolled his eyes and folded his arms. He even flopped his eyes down. However, Blossom was more concerned and cautious than Aster, like she usually is. "Bruno isn't a foreigner… is he?", Blossom asked. Bruno chuckled with a snide grin. "That's what I was about to tell you guys there: I'm part-Latino", Bruno said. Blossom and Aster stared into nothing, then at the First Girls.

“Now that’s proven, may I tell you guys how much you collectively suck?”, another member asked. Aster slaps the member, who is named Pearl. “No thank you”, Aster answered.

Soon enough, the other members noticed what was going on and stepped up. Stepping up for members was a rule of the team after all.

“Hey! What’s going on here?”, Mercury asked. The First Girls members were obviously scared, but not so much where they lie to step out of the situation. This was because all the members of First Girls are a member of Class 1, Mercury’s class. They know what Mercury is capable of if anyone ticks him off.

Well, everyone was scared except for one member, the leader: Claire. “We’re just having fun with your underlings, that’s all”, Claire chuckled. Bruno gasped, only realizing now that his former best friend is a member of the team. “Making fun of others is having fun, huh?”, Aster asked. “Claire! Why are you doing this?”, Bruno suddenly asked.

Claire widened her eyes as she stared at Bruno. “Finally realized, huh?”, Claire asked. “Wait, you know her?”, Aster asked. Bruno chuckled uncomfortably, then led out a large frown. “We were best friends… maybe even more than friends”, Bruno answered, his shoulders tugged next to his hips.

Bruno thought to his mind, “Gee, I wish the same thing doesn’t happen between me and ~~them~~ Alex”.

Claire flexed her knuckles, ready for some action.

“I’ll—We’ll start with the three of you”, Claire said. The other First Girls members grouped up together, and tried to corner Bruno, Aster and Blossom. This stopped as the other Team Toxic members stepped into the action.

“Hey! If you mess with them, then you’ll mess with us!”, Ivon said. The girls collectively laughed, not being afraid of the team anymore because of Claire.

Mercury was done with this attitude from the girls. He pushed Claire into the center of the group center and yelled, “You asked for it!”.

What follows is a fist fight against Claire and Mercury. Every other member of the groups was wondering if they should participate in the fight too, but they all knew that things would get bloody if that’s the case. The fight between Claire and Mercury was already heated.

All the other friend groups were watching the fight go on, as if it’s a WWE showdown. The Noble Students were silently watching, with their cold hearts. Team Hamster and Team Cats keep switching sides, from Team Toxic to First Girls. If they were to still exist, The Sunnys would be taking Team Toxic’s side just because Bruno is a member.

The other Team Toxic members were watching. Bruno, Aster and Blossom were upset while watching. Bruno was just amused, Blossom looked like she was about to cry, while Aster was simply mad. Aster stomped and drifted off from the scene. He was about to walk away from the group center until some people noticed him.

“Hey! Don’t leave us hanging!”, Blossom yelled. She suddenly pulled Bruno with her hand on his. Bruno was yelping and making funny noises. Aster turned back. His focus was only on Bruno and Blossom and not the shining velvet background full of doors.

“What do you want?”, Aster asked. “We want to go with you… to wherever you’re going!”, Blossom answered. Bruno’s eyes widened, his pupils dilated and wrinkles appeared below it. “We?”, Bruno asked. Blossom chuckled, trying to brush her hair with her hands. “Look, I just don’t want you to be lonely, Aster”, Blossom said, strangely bolder than she usually sounds like.

Aster rolled his eyes away and continued walking. “Fine. You two can come”, Aster said. Aster continued walking, now the others following him.

“Where are we going anyways?”, Bruno asked. Blossom hiccupped in a giggle. “Going to a secret place where only I and Aster go to!”, Blossom answered. Aster stopped, then pulled Blossom’s shirt next to him. “You’re lucky you told that to a friend”, Aster growled. Blossom folded her arms as she pushed Aster away, remembering all those times Aster acted aggressive towards her. Bruno was in the middle of it.

Drowned in silence, the three continued their path to the “secret place”, as Blossom would put it. Bruno kept coming up with possibilities of what it could be. A rock? An abandoned shack? A beautiful cliff? A beach? Maybe even an island? Bruno looked like he was in a trance, even. Aster and Blossom, meanwhile, couldn’t look at each other’s places. Aster’s mind was shrouded in memories, while Blossom’s was just shallow grudge.

“Hope nobody else finds us”, Aster said. Blossom squeaked. “Oh, maybe Vlad would!”, Blossom exclaimed. Aster approached a hill that would reveal the place. “Doesn’t matter. I mean, we could be in a billion places right now”, Aster scoffed off.

While Aster was saying that, Bruno stared at the sight. It was magnificent. There were lots of grass. There were maybe 28 different shades of green! The sea was sapphire blue. Since it was nearly sunset, the sky was pink, purple and blue. Pretty colors indeed. Not only where there the grass and the sea but also the rusty yellow sand, and many gorgeous, clean rocks. This surely wasn’t anything Bruno saw every day. It almost looked like heaven!

“Wow… is **this** the secret place?”, Bruno asked. Aster grinned for once. “Yeah”, Aster answered. Bruno’s eyes gaped at the sight of this. Blossom squealed in excitement, then pulled Bruno by the hand. “Come on down with me!”, Blossom smiled. She then pulled

Bruno and slid down through the grassy hill. It strangely didn't hurt, nor did the two of them get dirty.

"Wow! I didn't feel a thing!", Bruno chuckled. Blossom laughed alongside Bruno, even twirling around him. Aster followed by sliding down. He cleaned up his hands then approached a rock.

The rock was clean, with a bit of a rough edge to it. Aster laid his back down on it, crossing his legs and breathing smoothly to the sunset. "This is why I always run here", Aster said. Bruno approached Aster. Blossom followed him. "I don't understand, though. Why do you have to run away from your problems? You could always just… solve it at first hand", Bruno suggested. Aster sighed.

"It's you who don't understand, Bruno. It's easier said than done to solve a problem, you know? Imagine you having to deal with parents who don't even bother to show up at your birthday parties and having to deal with your best friend always being beaten up by their family", Aster said, not even making eye contact with anyone but the grassy ground.

All of a sudden, the cheerful nature of this open field turned to a somber, gray mood, at least in Bruno's perspective. He realized that he did understand what Aster meant.

Bruno knew how it feels like to not being able to solve a problem so much that he just had to… walk away. In some way, this could be called as a lie. Of course, it's just a simple lie. A lie that won't affect much. Those lies would grow to be much more than simple though. Lies would grow into a monster.

Bruno didn't even know Aster and Blossom were abused—or any of the Team Toxic members really. How and why would he know anyways? He only knew them for a couple months.

"Hey boys! Lightened up! At least we have each other, right?", Blossom asked, staying behind but between the two. Aster groans while Bruno has a warm smile.

Suddenly, sounds were being emitted from a faraway place. The three all glanced at the origin of the sound behind the rock. It was a rocky cave which seems dark inside. There wasn't even any sign of life, other than the grass of course.

Still, the three felt some sort of ghostly presence in the place. It's as if this liminal place is truly hiding something that they should know. For Bruno, it seems oddly familiar. "Don't tell me that's Moxie…", Aster whispered. Bruno shrugged, turning behind, not looking at the place. "I don't know why, but I keep having the nagging thought that I've seen the cave before", Bruno said.

Blossom gasped, turning behind the rock. Aster soon followed so. "But you've never even been here before… or have you?", Blossom asked. Bruno's face started to turn grim. His pupils always gravitated towards the grassy ground. Bruno then wore a pale look as he looked at his hovering hands. His hands made him feel like he was in a dream.

"I… I don't know…", Bruno answered with a devastated look. His body scratched while sliding down to sit on the ground. He leaned his smooth back towards the rough rock.

Aster sighed, saying "Doesn't matter whether it's familiar or not. What matters is: Deciding whether we stay here or we get back home". Bruno got up, standing statue still. "We have to go. It must mean something", Bruno said. "Ok!", Blossom agreed. Aster didn't say anything, just subtly agreeing with a nod.

In order to avoid being noticed, they were ninjas in the middle of the night, just shifting from tree to rock, tree to rock. They trot through lots of grass—some of it somehow got to Blossom's mouth!

The trio eventually reached the cave, hiding under bushes too. They saw plenty of pebbles just being plastered all across the ground. Right on the left side of the pebbles was the darkened cave.

The cave was pitch black. Utterly dark. Scary thing is: Bruno, Aster and Blossom could faintly see glowing eyes, hiding in the eternal dark abyss that is the cave. The eyes were blatantly staring back at the three. It's as if whoever the eyes belong to knows the three. Whatever is going on, the three are in danger. They couldn't care less, though. They were aware of the risk anyway.

Suddenly, footsteps were heard from the distance. It turns out that the footsteps were what the kids were hearing earlier. Who those footsteps belong to is the biggest question in their collective minds.

Once the figure got out of the thin, blade grass that covered the trees, it reveals Moxie, covered in dirt and even mud.

Bruno, Aster and Blossom were in shock—though less than anyone else who'd be in their shoes. "What's he doing here?", Blossom asked, in a whisper of course. Bruno and Aster didn't respond, as they wanted to keep a low profile from Moxie.

Moxie stepped up towards the cave, then entering the blackness. Before he did so though, he heard a crack from a stick in the distance. It came from Bruno who accidently stepped on a nearby stick. Thankfully, Moxie couldn't care much about it—only focusing on the cave for seemingly some reason. The cave was like a path to home to Moxie, from what it looks like to the three. Perhaps the cave contains answers to long-lasted questions that are awaiting to be answered.

Moxie moved his feet away from the dirt and emerald grass towards the smoky and rocky cave. While it was pitch black, Moxie could see anything. It's almost like he has night vision. Moxie's stiff body progressed away from Bruno, Aster and Blossom's sight.

Bruno gasped. He soon hopped out of the bush and walked towards the cave, viewing it closely. Aster and Blossom followed him, though more fearful than Bruno's calm feeling.

"Bruno! We're supposed to be on the low!", Aster whispered, restraining himself away from yelling. Bruno scoffed that matter away in favor for something that matters more to him—Moxie and this peculiar cave.

It turns out it was too late to hide back like Aster would want to, as Moxie found out. Indeed, Moxie was standing in front of the trio, creepily in the darkness. Only his eyes gaping out of the eerily shadow. The liminal atmosphere made things much more unsettling for the kids. Moxie's eyes were making him out as if he was a murderer, waiting to plot the next murder on the next few kids. Looks like those few are in front of him.

Moxie wasn't a murderer, which was good news. Instead of doing anything, he stepped out of the shrouded darkness and into the three's sight. Moxie didn't look out of place—he only had a messy hair and tired, depressing eyes. "What are you doing here…?", Moxie asked, more confused than upset.

Bruno, Aster and Blossom all chuckled uncomfortably in unison. Their sweat almost got to their clothes. "We were just… cur—". Bruno got stopped by a speeding Aster who was ready before Bruno could continue his sentence. "What are you doing in mine and Blossom's private place!?", Aster yelled. He was shaking Moxie by the chest while yelling. Moxie pushed Aster away in order to stop the manic shaking.

"I know it is! It's just that, I'm searching for my portal right now—and I suspect the most that it's here!", Moxie answered.

The three looked at each other, all equally as confused as the other.

"Your… portal… is here?", Bruno asked.

Moxie nodded. He sighed soon after, explaining with “You see, I came through my world here. I was hanging out with, er… my world’s Aster and Blossom, then I saw a portal here and went through it. I don’t know how I got to the ocean though…”.

Bruno smiled and walked towards Moxie. “It’s fine. Why don’t we all go?”, Bruno asked. Moxie smiled back, much softer and warmer than all the other times he smiled.

Before anyone could say anything, sudden lights were flashing.

Everyone’s eyes glided towards it. Looking at it reveals a portal. Moxie gasped, smiling much wider than before. “THAT’S IT!”, Moxie exclaimed, even squealing. Without even saying goodbye, Moxie ran towards the portal, with reckless abandoned. Aster didn’t like it, while Bruno and Blossom were just concerned about something. Moxie was so caught up in his excitement, that upon reaching the portal, it just… disappeared!

The three’s eyes widened out while Moxie gasped in sadness. A frown was being worn across his face. “It can’t be!”, Moxie shouted in denial. Moxie leaned himself down in denial, his leg supporting him. The three approached Moxie, despite the cave now being utterly dark. “It’s fine. If the portal just appeared, then it must appear later, right?”, Bruno asked. Moxie got up straight, towering over the kids.

“Yeah! You’re right!”, Moxie responded. Then he froze, remembering something that was apparently important. Moxie looked around the cave, but couldn’t find anything other than pitch black or Bruno, Aster and Blossom.

“Or maybe… it’s because I’m not the one”, Moxie whispered to himself. “… The one?”, Blossom asked. Moxie blinked once he noticed that Blossom noticed. “Yes, the one”, Moxie responded.

Bruno, Aster and Blossom blinked in sync, feeling a bit awkward. “Who or what is the one?”, Blossom asked. Moxie chuckled. “The one is basically like… the chosen one! Well, the chosen one in my world at least…”, Moxie explained.

“Chosen one! Who is the chosen one?”, Blossom asked. Moxie snapped his finger as he finally remembered who are they. “I remember them now!”, Moxie exclaimed. “… Them?”, Aster asked. Moxie got out of the cave, the three following him. “It’s you guys! In my world, of course”, Moxie said.

The three were frozen by this fact, then they started laughing. “Surely it isn’t the case here!”, Aster said. Bruno chuckled. “Of course it isn’t. There’s no way we’re the “chosen ones”. Whatever that means!”, Bruno answered. Bruno, Aster and Blossom all laughed together hysterically. Amidst the laughter, Moxie was standing like a statue in disappointment. Moxie knew what the three are signing up to once they become true friends, but at the same time, he doesn’t want them to know so they won’t feel upset. “I think we’ve got a good enough night!”, Blossom said.

The three got out of the private place. Moxie follows them. Well, Moxie was going to follow them after seeing the now utterly dark cave that was once a haven for him and his former friends. It was beautiful—but it seems like things are different somewhere else, far, far away.

While they were walking, Moxie started to elaborate more on “the one”. “The one” can practically save the world by defeating Utter Darkness, who didn’t seem to come to the current world yet. He, Bruno, Aster and Blossom theorized together that it couldn’t possibly be the three, so they agreed that they’d investigate through the whole school on who could be “the one”.

Chapter 15
Only One

The next morning, everyone was in their classes. Everyone. Even the Team Toxic members were in their classes. This is because Mr. Gregory has been spotted across the corridor. Even hearing the name of Mr. Gregory brings shivers down every student's spines, let alone hearing Mr. Gregory going next to those students.

Luckily, Mr. Gregory's trot through the halls and walls of Floor 8 isn't meant to be taken for intimidation, but rather to pass some important information. That information is about an event to be held in the school.

Mr. Gregory reached Class 2's door as the second class he went to spread the news to. Mr. Gregory was like a religious follower, spreading the good word about God.

"Everyone, I've got an important announcement", Mr. Gregory declared as soon as he walked into the board-filled classroom. The students, who were all frozen in their respective seats, just waiting to hear Mr. Gregory spit whatever he'll say out. Mr. Gregory stood like a soldier waiting for their next order.

"The annual dance will be held next Friday, so please do get ready by now. The main hall will be closed next week until Friday. During that timeframe, everyone has to stay in the gym while waiting for their parents. Please tell your guardians about this", Mr. Gregory announced.

The students were all holding in their squeals in excitement. The 8th grade formal, or the annual dance is a long-awaited event for students. Mr. Gregory knew this too, and he'll take this to his advantage… whatever that means.

Once Mr. Gregory took a single step out of the classroom, since his announcement was done, the entire class roared in a cheer. The other classes heard that, but none had the guts to check on what's going on—for obvious reasons.

"Shh! Kids! Keep your voices down", Mrs. Garcia suggested.

The kids giggled silently once they heard Mrs. Garcia. "Sorry, Mrs. Garcia! We're just so excited!", Nadia said. Mrs. Garcia started to gulp out a grin, though not one that'd be obvious. It's rather subtle.

Riley glared at Craig who was sitting next to Sid instead of Violet by that point. Riley couldn't bear with the fact that Violet might choose Craig over Riley as his dance date for the year. Ever since Violet joined the school back in Grade 7 and met Riley, she was dance partners with him. Granted, it was only a year ago. Still, Riley thought since the last year that they'd be dance dates until graduation.

Riley started to remember his previous dance parties before Grade 7. Most of those simply consisted of him staying and hanging out with Sheldon and Ryder, who were and still are his closest friends.

With her blissful ignorance swallowing her, Violet was looking at the teacher as if nothing's wrong. She wasn't even taking a single glance at Riley since she developed feelings about Craig.

"My business partner must be lucky, huh?", Riley thought, having a bit of an inside rage bottling up inside of his brain.

Mrs. Garcia was happily writing on the board with a green marker before she got a sudden ring under her pocket. "Hm?", she hummed. Upon taking her phone out of her pocket, Mrs. Garcia found out that she got a call from Mrs. Delilah.

"Mrs. Delilah? What's wrong?", Mrs. Garcia asked. She was sweating like raindrops falling from a sad cloud.

The phone grunted out indistinguishable noises that sounded like worried cries from a concerned mother that was taking care of 20 kids.

Apparently, the phone call was about Vlad sneaking into Class 1. He always does this, but it's only at that point where he was caught. Usually, Mrs. Delilah is too blinded to even see whether or not a student is cheating, even if they're cheating in front of her. This is why she is desired to be a teacher watching over students during exams.

During the call, Spencer was watching Riley as his cheeks started to grow numb from bottled up anger. Spencer felt bad, but at the same time, he didn't want to startle Riley, or even else, make him a lot more bent out of the shape than he already was.

"... Maybe it's better if I leave him be...", Spencer considered. He said that while he was turning pages of a book he was reading.

Once Spencer started reading, Mrs. Garcia ran out of the door out of an emergency. That perturbed everyone in the room—even Maverick and Mandy. "Did someone die…?", Winnie asked. Roselynn shrugged to the question. "Whatever it is, we must stay quiet and disciplined", Alex stated.

Suddenly, Riley slammed his palms onto his table, finally having enough of bottling up his red emotions. Riley's hair was on fire—his eyes too. "Craig, admit it! You've been having an affair with Violet!", Riley accused while pointing his index finger at Craig, who twisted his body at Riley just like everyone else in the classroom. "What do you mean?", Craig asked.

Their classmates collectively whistled out an “oooh”. Some seemed excited for the drama (especially the girls) while others felt like they got out of the loop.

“You’re secretly hanging out with Violet, I know that!”, Riley added. As soon as Violet heard that, her face stretched into shock. Her pupils inflated; her mouth grew. She led out a loud gasp. “Riley! We’re not having an affair!”, Violet responded, shaking Riley by the arm, trying her best to calm the wolf down.

That didn’t matter though. Riley shook Violet’s hand out of his elbow. “I know you are!”, Riley barked. Craig rolled his eyes. “How can we have an affair if we’re too young to even go on dates?”, Craig asked. Everyone led out an “oooh” like they did earlier. “Did you forget? We’re going to the formal on Friday, and we’re all having a dance partner!”, Riley answered.

Everyone was watching the situation go on as if it was a court case being solved over a lawsuit. “What made you come to this conclusion anyways?”, Craig asked. Riley was lost for words at that point, yet he was still determined to continue his arguments. “Violet’s starting to hang out with you! She even blushed when you kept on complimenting her!”, Riley spat out. Everyone gasped out loud, and in unison.

Sheldon and Spencer were watching this in complete fear. Sheldon was scared over his business partners fighting while Spencer knew what was going on this whole time. Spencer was a third party! “Should we do something about this?”, Sheldon whispered while asking. Spencer put his hand under his chin to think. “I think it’s best to inform something about this a-“. Spencer stopped once Sheldon walked out of his seat and out of the door amidst the arguing.

As soon as Sheldon opened the door, he bumped into Mrs. Garcia. “Sheldon? What are you doing here? Did you take Alex’s permission to leave?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Sheldon frowned, then sighed. “I didn’t

because I couldn't", Sheldon responded. Mrs. Garcia raised her eyebrows, wondering what could this mean. "You couldn't?", she asked.

Sheldon squeaked the door open, revealing the chaos that has been going on in the classroom behind the teacher's back. Mrs. Garcia gasped, her dress flowed across her legs.

The students started to notice the teacher's presence. Eventually, everyone paused in the middle of the fight session. Riley was about to punch Craig too—so Mrs. Garcia came in the nick of time before Riley could even hurt his fellow classmate (and his supposed business partner).

Riley backed out, leaning back then slipped his sneakers backwards to his seat. Craig did the same, instead with his squeaking normal shoes. The other students, meanwhile, sat straight, their arms crossed on their tables.

Mrs. Garcia huffed out some oxygen, or smoke if she was a dragon. Sheldon was standing beside her, seeing her towering over him. "Is this what really happens when I'm gone, kids? Playing games like it's some sort of warzone?", Mrs. Garcia asked, almost losing her words.

Maverick tapped his index finger on his wooden-textured table, replying sarcastically with straightened dug eyes, "Practically, yeah". Mandy chuckled right beside Maverick. Wanting to shut Maverick's mouth up, she almost forgot that she was a ghost! Mrs. Garcia sighed.

Without saying a word, she simply walked towards the teacher's table. She didn't even give her students a glance—she only looked down at her papers full of seeming nonsense. Sheldon, feeling awkward, took steps towards his table. His foot producing a lot of tip-toes that weren't even close to quiet. Sheldon's bandana flopped down from the embarrassment he might've caused himself.

He knew from the start that if he informed the teacher about this situation, everyone would be giving deadly glances at him. Nonetheless, he knew what he did was right. If he left his classmates the way they were, then who knows how much trouble would the students be in? Or even worse, how much of this would spread across the grade.

Bruno gets up from his seat, breaking the frozen silence. “Uh, teacher, may I—“. Before Bruno could even finish his sentence, Mrs. Garcia stopped him with, “Sure, you can”. Mrs. Garcia said it in such a defeated tone, that it concerned Bruno, and even the other students strangely enough.

Bruno pretended that he didn’t care about Mrs. Garcia. He sprung out of his seat and marched his way out of the class’s door. Bruno’s cap shook a bit before fully leaving the room. Feeling upset yet feeling like he can’t do anything about it, Bruno left the door alone, thus leaving Mrs. Garcia.

His concerns for his teacher washed away once he heard large footsteps plummeting his way towards his ear. Before he could know it, Moxie came behind him. Breathless, Moxie panted and soon told Bruno, “Let’s go now”. Bruno felt speechless, yet felt like he had to say something about the drama occurring among their classmates. “Worried about Riley and Craig, hm?”, Moxie asked.

Bruno stared into Moxie’s scarred purple eyes. Bruno knew that Moxie would’ve experienced this entire situation already. After all, Moxie experienced the end of the story itself.

“Moxie, can you tell me who this situation ends? You came from the future, right?”, Bruno frantically asked, jittering Moxie by shaking with his sweaty palms. Moxie had a spiky grin on him. Eventually, he pushed Bruno away in a matter of minutes. “Calm

down, Bruno. I may be from the future, but I wasn't even a part of your class—let alone this school! At least… since 4th grade", Moxie replied.

Bruno gasped, remembering something else about his once dearest friend. There were many questions Bruno could raise.

What happened when Moxie moved away?

How were his classmates?

Why did Moxie move away?

How is everyone in the future?

And most of all…

Why was he the one who would save the world?

Bruno asked the last question, which created an interesting reply. "Don't you get it, Bruno? You're the one", Moxie answered. Bruno got a static shock. An electrocuted heart at that point. He remembered something he almost forgot.

"Oh my god! The one! Right!", Bruno chuckled.

Moxie facepalmed. He knew why he even came to Bruno in the first place. Bruno was still too oblivious to even remember though.

The two started racing their way through Class 3 and 4. They eventually got Aster and Blossom and sat with them on the playground that was in the school grounds. The grounds were sandy, but rocky too. It was like a desert laid out under classrooms. The slides and swings were cold though. This was because of the strong winds that New Yorkers were frequently experiencing at that point of the year, which was near the end.

The swing frames were green, while the swing's roped hangers were gray. The seats were of blue, purple and pink color. Bruno, Aster and Blossom were sitting in the seats respectively. Behind them was a large wall made of bricks, meant to protect the

school from any harm. Out of any school in New York, the walls are strangely the strongest. It can even withstand an atomic bomb or even magic.

Sitting in front of the swings was a crossed-legged, sitting down Moxie. Moxie's hand waved its way out of his scarf, reaching to his chin, thinking of who could be the one. Suddenly, Blossom asked a burning question that she and her friends were having in mind.

"Who is Utter Darkness anyways?", Blossom asked.

Moxie smiled, standing up. "I'm glad you asked", Moxie replied. Moxie made up a gesture which would indicate him requesting the kids that they should get up and follow him. They did so, following him to a sand box. They sat next to it.

Moxie started to point his finger at it, then dug his finger into the sand. "You see, Utter Darkness is a matter full of, well, darkness! It's utterly dark as the name would suggest", Moxie explained. Moxie drew in the sand, depicting of a blob creature with two detailed eyes. During the explanation, he changed the blob into a man. A man with nothing but a normal body. Not even clothes or even hair. "Utter Darkness is… something else. It can do anything!", Moxie added with some despair.

The sand kept changing and changing, depicting more and more information about Utter Darkness. The sand drew a yellow man, having something branch out of it. A boy was beside him, being infected by the branch and floating. The man was gone. The boy was left alone with his two friends under him, then attacking them by pouncing and eating them.

The three kids collectively gasped. Their eyes all shrinking to peas. Moxie stared at them, not even being concerned of their fear. "… You mean… if any of us could get corrupted, then they'd kill us?", Blossom asked, nearly tearing up. Moxie, feeling as upset as them, silently nodded and hummed out an "mhm". Moxie turned his neck back to his drawings.

"There's no way to avoid the corrupted darkness… The only way to break it if you accept it… well… unless you're cursed", Moxie explained. Bruno stared at Moxie, sweating a bit. "Cursed?", Bruno asked. Moxie got up, kicked the sand, which erased the drawings. "Yes. But it only happens rarely. Actually, Bruno, you [redacted]

Look how [redacted]

"It's going to be fine, Bruno! We know you won't be the one [redacted]", Aster assured. Blossom nodded in agreement to her best friend. "Yeah! If anyone, it could be anyone else in this school! You're ordinary after all", Blossom added. Bruno smiled warmly. "Thanks guys", Bruno said. He start[redacted]

Why did this have to happen?

"Well, we're here to look for the one, aren't we?", Moxie asked. The kids got up in a determined fashion.

They started investigating the entire school once it's break. Of course, Mrs. Garcia, Mr. Mando and Mr. Barley all got mad at their students, but that didn't bother them much.

They started with the Class 1 students, since they are well-known to be special. Oddly enough for the four, none of the students matched the descriptions of "the one", which is supposed to be someone who is empathetic, brave, and (strangest of all the descriptions) they like the color blue. Harvey, who was the former class president and is well-known to be honest and brave, is the first suspect. The second is Mercury, since he is a leader. To Bruno, Aster and Blossom's disappointment, it wasn't Mercury. Claire was next, which upset Bruno. Luckily for him, Claire nor any of her team's

members were the one. Candace was close, but the "empathetic" description wasn't present at all.

The next is Bruno's class, which is Class 2. This gave Bruno some hope since he knows how exceptional a lot of his classmates are. One of his classmates is a cursed ghost and the other is a magician that is possessed! Strangely, Renard's possession is like Moxie's description of Utter Darkness…

Nobody fit the bill though. Not even Alex, which upsets Bruno a lot. Moxie considered Bruno, but Bruno declined that fact. He saw himself as too "ordinary" after all.

The next class was Blossom's unfortunate class, Class 3. As expected, nobody was the one either. Nobody expected anyone from the class to be "the chosen one" anyways. They couldn't even hurt a bug! Class 4 was even stranger, since the class is known to have strong and gifted students. The one who even came up with the idea of the class system, Hannah, wasn't the one! Not even the lorekeeper, not even the super special class president, Michael, was the one—and he is known as the best student of the entire grade!

*If **he** isn't the one… then who is?*

The four all wondered in their heads.

This investigation has been going on for the entire week, until Friday strikes.

"It **has** to be someone super-unexceptional!", Blossom said.
"Someone not so extraordinary…", Aster added.
"Someone who wrote the book called Extraordinary!", Laurel sung in the background.

All of Team Toxic approached the three and Moxie. "What's going on?", Mercury asked. Moxie gasped, staring right at Laurel and Ivon.

"Ivon, you like the color blue—would you call yourself…".

Moxie started to remember how much of a wimp Ivon can get when he's faced with danger. He knew at that point that there wasn't any hope in finding the one who isn't Bruno, Aster or Blossom.

"We're looking for the one", Bruno answered.

"It's basically, like, the chosen one who defeats some super evil bad guy who'll destroy the world in the future", Blossom added.

Aster hopped out of his place. "And if the one doesn't defeat it, the world is gone! And if there's no Earth… There's no money!", Aster added in desperation from his greed.

"Where did you get that information?", Ivon asked in a funny tone while crossing his arms in suspicion. "From my world, Ivon. This exists in my world—why not in yours?", Moxie asked.

Mercury thought about it. Then Mercury held Bruno by his shoulder. "Bruno, what did you read in those Extraordinary books?", Mercury asked. Bruno tried to get his memories racing, but unfortunately couldn't. He was left silent. "I don't remember…", he replied.

"Just believe me. There has to be a chosen one in this world! What I know is that it's someone in this school", Moxie said in seeming denial. "Who said it can't be someone from another grade?", Kyanide asked while nearly snoring his way to sleep. Moxie thought about it, then remembered something. "Someone did suggest that", Moxie grinned, a little bit mischievously.

The team's faces all have gotten surprised. "Who did, hmmm?", Kyanide tried to inspect. "Oh, and can that person tell me how to jump high enough to each the classroom's roof?", he added suddenly. Moxie's tongue twisted in confusion. "Well… It was a guy named Mr. Voyant", Moxie answered.

Ivon rubbed his chin, while Mercury, who was beside him, seemed interested in this. Apparently, Mr. Voyant is a famous psychic around the Manhattan suburbs. He is known as the only

psychic who is actually right! Voyant also has a son who studies in the school. “Mr. Voyant, huh? He lives around my neighborhood’s corners”, Ivon stated. Bruno raised his eyebrows. Bruno didn’t know anything about Manhattan, so he would obviously know nothing about Voyant.

“Who is Mr. Voyant?”, Bruno asked. Mercury explained who Voyant is—practically a true psychic. Bruno gasped. He felt happy, and at the same time, surprised. It looks like saying it’s “too good to be true” is false in this situation for Bruno. “Don’t be too excited, Bruno. Voyant always travel from country to country, so it’s rare to see him in the US—let alone New York!”, Ivon said. Bruno sighed deeply, shrouded by disappointment. “Voyant **did** tell me about the one before you came to this school”, Moxie suddenly said.

Bruno walked away from everyone, then tilted his head, looking right at Moxie’s irises. “Moxie, let’s get back to class. The bell is going to ring soon”, Bruno told Moxie. Moxie folded his arms together, all concerned. “Aren’t we—“. Moxie got stopped by Bruno, who said “We’re going to continue this later”. Moxie bit his tongue, shut his lips, and followed Bruno. Moxie and Bruno didn’t even look back at the team. Vlad hopped, realizing and remembering that he’s a Class 2 member as well. “Whoops! Got to go too!”, Vlad exclaimed, chuckling a bit. Vlad followed the two, a little awkwardly.

“By the way, Bruno, our classmates have gotten… a bit wilder than usual”, Vlad chuckled uncomfortably, knowing that Bruno would get upset.

Bruno did. He sighed loud out, and held his palm to his forehead. Bruno didn’t even manage to get a word out.

The three were taking their steps towards the Class 2 classroom, which was an utter mess at that point. While they were walking, an odd dark matter was hiding in the corner of the Class 2 and 4 area,

which was on the corner of Floor 8, on the opposite side of the Class 1 and 3 area.

The dark matter was a blob, similar to the looks of the drawings Moxie made in the sandbox. The dark matter wasn't the only one of themselves either. There were other dark matters hiding around the wall. Sticking to it. The dark matters were nearly invisible, since the area was so dark. The dark matter slithered. It was alive. It was following Bruno specifically. It's almost like… it's targeting him…

Chapter 16
Divide and Conquer

Bruno, Vlad and Moxie finally reached the Class 2 classroom… just to find an argument hell going on. The students were lunging their heads right onto the table, as if Terrance was around to murder them. The only ones who weren't were Riley, Craig, Violet and Sheldon, the latter two who didn't even want to get involved in this. Bruno and Moxie were watching in complete concern for Sheldon and Violet, while Vlad was close to leading out a loud snicker—one loud enough to make the court case worse.

Bruno ran across the warzone and reached his seat. Moxie and Vlad luckily avoided the four too—though more of so two. One thought was nagging inside of Bruno head: Where is the teacher?

Bruno approached Alex by crawling. Alex was hiding like a hedgehog under his table. Bruno was doing the same thing as Alex was, only curling a lot less. "Alex, what's going on?", Bruno yelled while asking because of the obnoxiously loud screams and shouts spouting out of the kids' mouths. "I think our classmates allowed Riley and Craig to get… too far", Alex replied somehow.

"Oh, how will Mrs. Garcia think of me? The class president not even dealing with this situation. Why did everyone even pick me?", Alex asked in sadness.

Bruno blew his hair strand off, letting it stay in it place, before he was going to say something. "Well, we did vote for you back in the middle of October… Everyone was busy with building the hangout during that time!", Bruno said. Alex sighed even more, knowing that Bruno won't aid in his regrets. "I'm not helping I know", Bruno grinned and chuckled.

Alex grinned and chuckled at the same time.

"At least you're self-aware", Alex cheered up while saying.

Suddenly, Mrs. Garcia opened the door with a loud bang. She was more furious than ever! That's bad news for anyone who isn't new to the class—which is the majority of the students.

"I've been telling all of you, over and over again about all this and you never listened!", Mrs. Garcia yelled.

Riley and Craig didn't seem to be worried by a bit. None of their parts were even falling off in fear like the other students were. Craig was the oddest in this situation though. Craig is usually calm and collected—sweet and charming too. It's a bit odd that Craig was even participating in the fight in the first place.

"Teacher, can you just stop this…?", Sheldon asked.

Winnie rose out of her seat and suddenly asked with a cute accent, "And where's Mr. Doble?". Mr. Doble is supposed to come to their class, since on Fridays, he would come on the period after the break. Creepily enough, students have been Mr. Doble before this point too. Mr. Doble even wished a good morning at the Class 4 girls before classes start.

Mrs. Garcia bit her tongue at the second she heard Winnie's question, literally too. Mrs. Garcia's lips were tucked into her mouth, hiding it. Her pupils shrunk into little beans. "Mr. Doble… right… you see…", she frowned with melancholy. She couldn't even look into her students' faces.

"… He went missing", Mrs. Garcia suddenly said.

Everyone gasped collectively.

"MISSING!?", everyone yelled.

"It's because of you, right Craig! Trying to convince Mr. Doble that he should approve every artwork of Violet!", Riley argued. Craig stomped on his left foot, yelling "How does that even make sense!?".

Mrs. Garcia sighed deeply, in an angered tone too. Her palms were touching her forehead in disappointment in what she's witnessing.

"Kids, kids, if you argue for longer, we won't be able to find Mr. Doble", Mrs. Garcia said.

Riley and Craig huffed once they heard that. They turned their bodies away from each other.

Moxie started sensing something, then beginning to feel like he should tell something. He did. "I think I know who took Mr. Doble", Moxie said. Everyone gasped as much as they did when they found out about the news. "Was it you, time travelling weirdo!?", Carly accused.

Moxie flinched, then denied that with his hands making a gesture. "What? No!", Moxie declined. Moxie sighed right after. "It's about what I interviewed most of you for: The darkness!", Moxie said.

Everyone blinked silently, except for Bruno. Vlad was just unbothered by this seeming nonsense.

"The darkness couldn't have taken Mr. Doble, right?", Connor stammered in fear. Moxie looked at the ground, then at the students. Determination but also uncertainly filled his mind.

Bruno suddenly stomped on his foot while Alex was watching Bruno getting a bit ticked off. "Moxie, you were supposed to tell me that before…", he said. Moxie crossed his arms once he faced Bruno. "Well, it's only because this conflict just started getting worse", Moxie said.

Violet broke in tears. The other students were only watching as collective audience while Violet was breaking down. Riley led out a big frown—so did Craig, though he was covering it with his hands. "Just admit it! This is all my fault! I just wanted another friend!", Violet cried.

“Violet, no, it isn’t!”, Riley assured.

Before Riley could put her messy stranded hair away from her lovely face, Violet pushed Riley’s hand out of her way, soon his body, then ran straight out of the class, being flooded with tears.

“Violet!”, Craig called out. Riley got out of his seat while watching with Craig as Violet ran out of the class, then the floor. Riley noticed Craig across him, but instantly looked away from him in anger. Craig did the same.

Mrs. Garcia was even more mad!

“Look at what you did! Now you got one of your classmates to run away in tears!”, Mrs. Garcia yelled.

Craig and Riley finally faced each other, then looked both down at the ground in shame of what they did. They didn’t mean for any of this to happen, obviously. Sheldon approached the two and then yelled at then, “And you’ll see how great Craig’s Ground will run if the two of you will keep fighting! One of you will go insane, kill people, then the people you killed become ghosts that haunt the hangout, killing even more people—causing some dumb horror game to be made!”.

Everyone blinked blankly and awkwardly at Sheldon, as if he’s insane. “What?”, Craig said. Sheldon chuckled the same way everyone blinked.

“You know… that does give me a good idea for a video game…”, Alex said in the background in the middle of the silence.

Suddenly…

“AAAAHHHH!”.

A bloodcurdling scream came out of nowhere! Everyone gasped together.

“That sounded like…”, Craig whispered.

“THAT SOUNDED LIKE VIOLET!”, Riley shouted.

Mrs. Garcia, who was looking through the door's small window, turned back to her students. "Students! Stay under your seats!", Mrs. Garcia commanded. "I'll handle this", she added with a quieter tone.

Before anyone could sit though…

Renard's eyes turned to black.

"Renard?!", Max exclaimed.

Renard suddenly started floating into the air. He was levitating as if he was… possessed. Renard's eyes starting crying out curious black liquid that is foreign to everyone—even a scientist won't be able to identify it. Renard's skin started to grow darker, and not in a skin tone now. No, it's pure black.

His classmates were watching, frightened. His teacher was horrified and concerned about his health. She knew she would get fired or even worse; be responsible for a child's death.

Renard suddenly started laughing.

"Ha ha ha ha…".

It made his classmates even more uncomfortable than they already were. This was because Renard's laugh was a lot more uniform than usual. Renard's laugh is his signature one that goes "khe khe khe!". This laugh sounded like it came from someone… or something… else.

While the students were watching Renard float up higher and higher above the concrete ground, they could hear cries from Class 3. The ones who heard it presume that Class 3 is now under attack by some unknown entity that might cause Renard.

The students were also experiencing déjà vu. It reminds them of when Renard disappeared the second week of school. Could this entity be the one who haunted his dream the same day? Could this entity be involved with Renard's disappearances? And most of all:

Could this be the reason why Renard suddenly attacked them during break that day? Those questions were never answered.

Moxie was the most afraid. He was the only one who never made any questions because he knew the answers. Moxie was familiar with the entity.

All of a sudden, Renard levitated down to the ground. Making a stance that indicates a battle, Renard looked down, his face not being revealed. It was obscured by the darkness. Afterward, Renard stared at Moxie. “Hello… Moxie…”, Renard laughed maniacally.

Everyone’s eyes widened in fear. They all backed away from Renard—everyone except for Moxie. “Utter Darkness, huh? Should’ve known you came to this world”, Moxie scoffed.

“Utter what?”, Maverick questioned with a comic tone.

Suddenly, Renard tackled Maverick. He was furious by the fact that Maverick could even question the existence of Utter Darkness. Renard was even growling like a wolf. “For the record, Moxie…”, Renard said when getting up from a fallen down, Maverick.

Mandy ran to Maverick, worried for him. She straightened him up. “I’m not the Utter Darkness you know”, Renard said.

Renard’s eyes were finally revealed, and they were threatened. They were black with tiny red pupils. His eyebrows led out an angry face. “So the Utter Darkness here started his rampage early in here? That’s insane”, Moxie said to himself. Renard laughed even more.

At this point, some of the shyer students started tearing up. “Stop laughing…!”, Connor begged. Connor was on Casper’s leg, who he was protected under. Renard turned his head to Connor. His head twisted around like an owl. Renard’s neck didn’t even make out a crack from his bones.

“Why? Seeing all of you in pain is like music to me”, Renard joked. Casper sobbed, covering his face away from Renard.

“Now it’s my turn to my other self”, Renard said.

“Your… other self?”, Riley asked. Being the brave boy that he is, he approached Renard closer.
“Yes, yes. You finally got it. Geez, I guess all this girlfriend drama really made you smarter than I thought, Riley Ferris”, Renard replied while rolling his eyes sarcastically.
“Why are you all so scared? I’m the funny chappy Renard you know and love, come on!”, Renard laughed.
“You’re not!”, Sheldon replied.

Renard rolled his eyes yet again, while making comedic mimicking gestures, mimicking Sheldon. Renard started laughing like crazy, even breaking a leg a bit. “You guys are just comedy gold!”, Renard said while laughing.

“Well, I got to go. My other self is going to run the show instead…”, Renard said. His voice changed a lot more. His pitch ran deeper. His tone… almost demonic.

Renard fell down as he felt something getting back into his guts.

Renard’s body seemed almost like a corpse. Lifeless. Luckily, Spencer examined Renard’s body. “Don’t worry guys, he’s fine”, Spencer assured. Max frowned the hardest out of everyone. “I don’t usually experience strong emotions, but this hurts as much as the first time he acted out”, Max explained. “It’ll be fine, Max. I know Renard will be the same way he always is!”, Winnie smiled.

“But everyone. We should be watching out for the other one of the entities”, Moxie said. Moxie looked at the floor, demented. His hair almost dropping down. “That entity being Utter Darkness…”, he added.

Mrs. Garcia approached Moxie with a furious expression on her. She’s clearly upset and misunderstanding this situation. “Moxie, did you cause this?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Moxie got up, surprised by this. He wanted to defend his name from this teacher.

“What? No!”, Moxie denied.

“If I did… then I didn’t mean it. I want to destroy Utter Darkness. He’s the reason why my world is even at war!”, Moxie added.

Mrs. Garcia raised her eyebrows. She then turned around just to find her students feeling hurt and upset. She knew that believing Moxie would at least get rid of “the darkness”.

“I swear I’m telling the truth…”, Moxie begged.

“I believe you”, Mrs. Garcia replied.

Moxie smiled wide in excitement. Moxie got up, since he was crouching down in sadness. “If you’re right, then we have to work together”, Mrs. Garcia said. She turned to her students who were surrounding her in an almost circle-like formation. “… You remember what I taught you during those group assignments!”, Mrs. Garcia yelled.

The students sighed and rolled their eyes. Their hatred of group assignments affected them in some way, and it did in this situation. Luckily, they still remember the magic of teamwork—at least most of them.

“Fine. Let’s listen to Moxie first”, Alex suggested.

“You definitely should, since I’ve got an idea or two of how to defeat the darkness. But I need the power of all of you! And I do definitely need suggestions from all of you too”, Moxie stated. Everyone’s faces lit up in determination. Everyone except for Bruno. Bruno sighed, not because he had to work together with his classmates or because Moxie didn’t tell Bruno about anything of this. He was rather upset because of his thoughts. “Right…”, Bruno responded.

Everyone got up from their seats and formed a true circle. They gathered ideas and hatched up a plan. A plan to defeat that thing!

The entirety of Class 2 got out of the classroom together and lined up out of the school grounds. While walking, everyone watched them march out of the school out of their classroom's window. The juniors were especially curious and even tried to get out, but their teachers pulled them back from doing so. They knew something was up.

When the students reached the playground and was about to face the darkness, the sky turned red. A bloody, dark red. The clouds were pink.

They were confused, yet afraid at the same time. The perfect type of fear emitted by the students for the darkness. Feeling scared, the students ran around. "What's going on?!", Bruno yelled while asking. He was the only student not running since he was following Moxie's orders. "I don't know!", Mandy exclaimed while flying through the air as a ghost.

Suddenly, sparkles were floating in the air. The students stopped to watch what was going on. The sparkles began to float down and down until it reached as much as it could on the ground. It was still levitating. The sparkles then turned into a bright light that turned to… The Class 3 students?

They were all tied together. Their mouths were even taped. Oddly enough, the only one who wasn't there was Blossom. Even Mr. Mando was present.

Everyone in Class 2 gasped in unison.

"Oh no! Our classmates!", Jasmine cried, addressing both her and Marlyn. "Thank goodness we moved to Class 2", Marlyn added, chuckling a bit.

Mrs. Garcia ran towards Mr. Mando and then ripped off his mouth tape. The tape also ripped off Mr. Mando's moustache, which obviously hurts him. "Ow! My moustache!", Mr. Mando exclaimed. "Sorry, Mr. Mando. What happened? Why are you and your students tied up?", Mrs. Garcia asked frantically. Mr. Mando was almost

breathless, yet he could still say something. “The darkness… it’s taking over!”, Mr. Mando answered. Mrs. Garcia’s eyes grew in fear, backing away from Mr. Mando in fear. Her students were as horrified as her.

Suddenly… the same sparkles appear, but instead of a person coming out, a shadow-like figure appears. It was a blob resembling a silhouette of a human. The figure had a mouth that was a hole in its shadow. Other than the mouth, the figure had no facial figures or any human-like figures like hair or nails.

“Well, well, well, it has finally come to this”, a voice came out. It was from the shadow blob. It was flying up in the air.

The students felt uneasy. It’s almost like that blob has some power over everything in the universe. It’s almost like the blob isn’t even from the same world.

“Utter Darkness!”, Moxie exclaimed.

“Wait”, Maverick stopped. “That’s Utter Darkness?”.

Craig facepalmed while shaking his head. Beside him was Sid, who looked confused as ever. Everyone else was simply unamused. “You’re ruining the moment!”, Mrs. Garcia shouted. Maverick chuckled awkwardly.

“Yes, I am Utter Darkness!”, Utter Darkness greeted.

Renard woke up from his short sleep. It was apparently from a nightmare that Utter Darkness caused. “Utter Darkness!? But you didn’t look like this before…”, Renard said. Moxie turned to Renard, then shook him. “Renard, that’s Utter Darkness from my world!”, Moxie said.

Utter Darkness started laughing. The laugh was similar to the laugh Renard had when he was possessed. “And you brought me here”, Utter Darkness snorted. Utter Darkness then turned behind everyone. “Oh wait…”, it suddenly stopped. It turned back to everyone. “I brought you here!”, Utter Darkness shouted while pointing at Moxie.

“You… did? I thought I came here because of some freak accident”, Moxie replied.

Utter Darkness plummeted himself down to the ground. Two eyes suddenly opened. They were black and white, but mainly black. The eyes seemed… unnatural… Very unnatural. It’s almost like someone trying to draw an eye without clear detail.

Everyone stared at Utter Darkness in fear. “Well, you didn’t”, Utter Darkness replied. Bruno stomped in anger. “Why are you doing this!?”, he asked, agitated by what’s going on.

“Don’t you know? Kidnapping all of Class 3 does lower the chances of being defeated. Kidnapping all of Class 4… that’ll be a fun task!”, Utter Darkness replied. “Oh, and I’m doing this for… hmm… Complications”, he added.

Bruno’s eyes widened the same way his classmates did.

“You didn’t even kidnap Blossom!”, Moxie yelled.

“Oh shut up. Besides, I was planning to get Class 2 next… It looks like I got served in a silver platter!”, Utter Darkness said. “And I already got one of you”.

Utter Darkness stomped on the ground, revealing Violet coming out of a sparkle. Violet was tied up; her mouth taped the same way all of Class 3 was. Riley and Craig gasped together. “VIOLET!”, the two yelled at the same time.

“Here’s a bit of a deal: If you win a battle against me, you get Violet and all of Class 3 back. If you lose… THEN YOU’LL BE ONE OF THEM!”, Utter Darkness said while levitating up to the air. His eyes closed. His mouth wasn’t even present anymore.

Utter Darkness suddenly started expanding, getting big.

“Deal!”, Bruno impulsively said.

“WHAT!?”, everyone yelled in unison.

“Look, we’ve got no choice. We’re strong too”, Bruno replied.

“We’re strong—BUT NOT AGAINST A LITERAL DEMON MONSTER THING!”, Maverick yelled.

“We’re not enough, Bruno”, Paul sighed.

“How about us?”, a voice asked.

It was Vlad and the rest of Team Toxic! Everyone gasped, all smiling. All except for Mrs. Garcia. “Young man, where were you!?”, Mrs. Garcia shouted. Vlad blushed, looking slightly away from Mrs. Garcia in pure embarrassment. Mercury came closer to Class 2. “We’re here to help! Since, well, Bruno and Vlad are here. Moxie too!”, Mercury announced. “Is that fine, Mr. President?”, Mercury asked, addressing Alex. Alex blushed. “Of course. Help is appreciated”, Alex answered. They shook hands in compromise.

“YAY! GROUP FIGHT!”, Winnie cheered. Everyone smiled alongside Winnie.

“Wow, my classmates are tied up? Too bad for them”, Blossom taunted. Aster snickered.

Everyone lined up together. Ready to fight for their lives.

“FIGHT!”, Alex commanded.

Chapter 17
Final Wish

Everyone charged up at Utter Darkness, all determined to win against the monster. The darkness multiplied into single bodies. Those bodies were copying the body structures of everyone in the fight. Everyone was blowing punches at the shadows, kicking it or trying to smash it with something.

Renard was even using his illusion magic to confuse the darkness. Max was somehow shooting laser beams out of nowhere, which confused Carly who was beside him. “Tuh! You can shoot laser beams!? How?!”, she exclaimed. Max looks at his hands, confused. “I don’t know”, Max answered.

Meanwhile, Craig was being cornered by his clone. He was backed against a literal wall. He felt the fear that his life might end by then. In a nick of time, Riley kicked down the shadowy clone, grinning at Craig. Riley seemed taller and higher than Craig at the time, but in reality, Craig was taller. Riley reached his hand for Craig, so Craig accepted it and held his hand back. He got up. “I’m sorry…”, Riley apologized. Craig hugged Riley. “It’s ok”, he forgave. Craig back away from Riley, setting himself for a fight. “Now let’s fight for Violet!”, Craig said with determination. “Yeah!”, Riley replied. The two ran off to defeat all the clones.

Moxie was the only one who defeat his clone, to which he decided to approach the main shadow. Bruno finished his and followed Moxie, concerned for him. “Moxie, what are you doing?”, Bruno asked while walking with him. “Confront the darkness. That’s what I’m doing”, Moxie answered with a straight face. Bruno’s face went from confused to concerned. “How are you supposed to do that?”, Bruno asked. “I did it before—I can do it again”, Moxie said.

Before Moxie could even reach the forcefield between Utter Darkness and everyone else, it got out.

"Here to confront me, eh? Good luck doing so this time. You don't even have Aster and Blossom", Utter Darkness said. It then turned back to look at the two. "Or maybe you will…", it smiled.

Utter Darkness snapped its fingers, letting the clones disappear. "Huh?!", Blossom exclaimed. Aster and Blossom exchanged looks, then they were teleported to Bruno, though in the air. They fell on Bruno, forming a pile.

"Look at them, Moxie! The ones who'll destroy me can't even land in the ground", Utter Darkness insulted.

The three got up. "For the record: We just met each other", Aster corrected. Bruno and Blossom both nodded. "That's the truth, Utter Darkness. Not only that: but things are different here too. I'm sure they're not going to defeat you here", Moxie stated. "At least I don't think so…", Moxie added with a bit of uncertainty.

"Fine", Utter Darkness said. "I'm done with this fun anyways". It said that while it snapped its fingers to make all the clones disappear, stopping the fight.

"Well, Moxie. If you want to get home, then you got to follow me into the portal!", Utter Darkness challenged.

It flied up to the air, forming a portal. The portal was so high that Moxie couldn't even come close to each it.

"Can you reach it, or can you not?", Utter Darkness mocked. Moxie gasped, then formed a maddened expression.

Moxie followed Utter Darkness as he kept teleporting the portal along his way. The follow turned into a chase. Everyone was watching, wanting to help him but couldn't. Some didn't even know what was going on at this point.

Moxie finally reached Utter Darkness' left foot. Moxie's sweaty hands surprisingly could hold on for a while. Utter Darkness started flying up as he realized that Moxie grabbed him. Starting to lift up into the air, Moxie looked down in fear.

Before he could go any higher, the members of Team Toxic formed a line and then all grabbed him, forming a chain that was pulling Utter Darkness and Moxie down to the ground. Well, all of Team Toxic was there except for Kyanide.

"Guys?", Moxie asked in an almost panicked tone. Mercury, who was the fifth in line behind Bruno, Aster and Blossom, made a nod at Moxie. "We Team Toxic members always look out for each other! Since you're one of us, we're sort of obligated to help you", he said. Moxie smiled.

Suddenly, Utter Darkness, in a middle of a fury he felt that Moxie might beat him, started to expand his shadows to the point where he didn't even look like a human. Instead, he looked like a galaxy. Some sort of nebula. Darkness filled the field. Nobody could even see well other than Team Toxic.

Moxie's eyes started growing once Utter Darkness started lifting up. "Only if Kyanide was here!", Laurel cried. Ivon was reaching out for Laurel, since he was the base kid. Suddenly, Ivon was lifted off the ground! "No!", Ivon yelled.

Team Toxic and Moxie were lifted off the ground!

"So much for Team Toxic!", Utter Darkness laughed.

Nobody could bring them down to the ground, since everyone was already worn out from the fight. They finished it at that point.

Suddenly, Kyanide came in behind Team Toxic. "Guys?", Kyanide asked. "KYANIDE! COME HERE YOU SLEEPY HEAD!", Mercury yelled. Mercury's eyes turned into metaphorical fire. Kyanide jumped in fear.

He went up to the team, just to find out how high they are. “I can’t make it!”, Kyanide said, trying to jump to grab Ivon’s foot.

“Jump high, Kyanide! You can do it!”, Bruno encouraged. “Believe in yourself!”.

Kyanide’s eyes turned into stars. Remembering what he has done to jump up high, he jumped high, believing that he could. All he wanted during the recent weeks was to jump so high that he could feel like he could fly…

And he did!

Kyanide jumped as high as he could to reach Ivon. Everyone in the team gasped, then smiled. “You did it, Kyanide!”, Laurel congratulated. “What the!?”, Utter Darkness exclaimed. Kyanide pulled everyone down to the ground by grabbing onto Ivon’s foot.

Moxie tried to punch Utter Darkness, but Utter Darkness avoided it. Utter Darkness started going into the portal, Moxie pulled him, then to the ground. Utter Darkness was somehow still levitated off the ground.

“The portal! You don’t want to get home?”, Utter Darkness asked. Moxie shook his head, but not saying it as a no. “I do. And I want you to go too”, Moxie replied. “How can you defeat me anyways? You’re not the one!”, Utter Darkness suddenly said.

Moxie froze as he realized the truth. He truly can’t. The only ones who can defeat the darkness is “the one” after all. Moxie isn’t the one.

“Moxie, you can. Maybe you’re the one and you never realized it!”, Bruno comforted in the background. Moxie looked behind to see his new friends. Moxie then looked down at the ground. He saw a puddle of water, which showed a reflection of himself.

Moxie led out a determined face, later a determined stance. He stood high between Team Toxic and Utter Darkness.

“I am!”, Moxie said.

Utter Darkness had an angered face at this point. Moxie started to jump on Utter Darkness and punched him. Utter Darkness threw Moxie to the wall with its powers. Utter Darkness walked towards Moxie. The darkness subdued at this point, which allowed Moxie to see better.

Moxie kicked Utter Darkness right at the "eye", then tackled it to the ground. "Should we help?", Vlad asked. "Don't. I can do this myself", Moxie assured.

Moxie pulled Utter Darkness up and strangled him, though that didn't work since Utter Darkness isn't even breathing in the first place. Nonetheless, Moxie threw Utter Darkness to the wall. It got up. "You really haven't changed, have you?", Utter Darkness asked. Utter Darkness laughed, then started growing larger. Utter Darkness started to try to stomp on Moxie, but Moxie kept dodging them.

Moxie, who was crouching down to avoid being crushed, got up then jumped to get Utter Darkness' legs out. Utter Darkness landed in front of the swings. Moxie came up to Utter Darkness.

The red sky made the atmosphere seem creepy, but cool at the same time. The air felt like it was nonexistent. The suspense and adrenaline among the students were at a high point. At this point, the suburbs of Manhattan were in a panic because of the sky since it's the only part of New York that has been affected.

"I **am** the one!", Moxie yelled while charging at Utter Darkness. Utter Darkness dodged Moxie.

Moxie looked at the sandbox and remembered when he told Bruno, Aster and Blossom about Utter Darkness and "the one". At that moment, he realized that he forgot about one thing that he didn't tell the three.

The one can wish for anything. But they can only wish for one thing.

"If I'm the one then… Yes I can!", Moxie affirmed himself.

“Looking at a sandbox? How will that defeat me?”, Utter Darkness asked.

Moxie glared at Utter Darkness, almost making him freeze, but not as much as an average person would if you’d give them a deadly glare. “That will”, Moxie replied.

Moxie stood with his legs apart, yet still together at the same time. Before he could say what he want to say, he looked at Bruno, Aster and Blossom, then nodded at himself, looking back at Utter Darkness.

“I wish I and Utter Darkness get back home”, Moxie wished.

Utter Darkness’s past smile now turned into a frown. A frown that was carved out through his shadow body. “Are you serious!?”, it yelled.

Moxie and Utter Darkness started floating above the ground. A portal appeared behind them. Everyone in the field gasped. Bruno ran towards Moxie. “Moxie! You’re getting back home!?”, Bruno yelled. “Yes. I’ll wish you luck here, Bruno”, Moxie said.

Bruno frowned. Utter Darkness started at Bruno who was behind Moxie in his perspective. He smiled. A sudden dark but subtle trail was going through from his shoulder. It reached to Bruno’s brain.

Bruno’s eyes suddenly turned to black for a second. “You know… there isn’t a one. There are the ones now…”, a voice said. Bruno’s world turned to black while the voice was talking. Things went back to normal in Bruno’s eyes once the voice is gone. “What…?”, he questioned himself in denial.

Moxie and Utter Darkness went back home. The portal led them to their barren world. Moxie led out a warm smile at everyone.

The portal faded away. So did the red sky with it.

Everything was normal. As it should be.

Everyone cheered together. Class 3 were freed by the Class 2 students at this point. “Hip-hip-hooray!”, everyone cheered. Bruno was the only one who wasn’t happy. He was just sitting there. Silent. Staring at the ground. Trying to process what just happened.

Bruno finally got up and approached Team Toxic, smiling now.

Suddenly, Mr. Gregory broke into the scene. “I’m so sorry everyone for coming late!”, Mr. Gregory apologized. Renard snickered and replied with, “It’s fine”. Riley hugged Violet while Craig was smiling. “I’m sorry, Violet”, Riley apologized. “It’s alright”, Violet forgave.

Mr. Gregory looked at the damage made at the field. There wasn’t a lot, despite the action that just occurred. “Well, I should be talking to the officials about this…”, Mr. Gregory whispered to himself. “Anyways, all of you should get ready for the formal now. I hope none of you forgot”, Mr. Gregory chuckled. Everyone laughed. “We almost did. There was all of this drama”, Mrs. Garcia said. “That’s understandable. Either way, all of you should start dressing up. School finishes early today and don’t forget to come to the formal at 6 PM”, Mr. Gregory informed.

Everyone got out of school and get ready for the occasion.

Chapter 18
Together Tonight

Everyone was getting prepped for the party. It's going to be exciting for everyone. Dancing, eating, everything that's fun will be there! Everyone is planning to dress up, wear their makeup, or just wear silly bowties. Anything goes for the formal as long it's, well, formal.

Team Toxic were getting ready together. They were in the team's "headquarters" in the hangout. They all got their fancy dresses and tuxedos. Bruno was even wearing one, and he doesn't like wearing fancy.

"Eeee! This is so exciting!", Blossom squealed, hugging Laurel. "Heck yeah!", Laurel replied. Laurel suddenly brought out a giant box of pizza. "And don't forget to bring this!", she added. Everyone stared at it. "How are you going to carry that to school?", Ivon asked. Laurel pulled out a giant square bag, the same size as the pizza box. "Two words: Pizza bag", she answered while pulling the pizza box into the bag.

Everyone looked at each other, then laughed together.

All eight walked their way to the school since it wasn't that far. It was 6:30 PM, so lots of people were already there. The team rushed through the door together. They saw all the decorations and heard the music. The music was the most popular songs at the time, which is during 2012.

The members ran to their classmates. Bruno and Vlad were trotting their way to Class 2. "I'm not really into parties, but I think this is amazing!", Bruno said to Vlad. Vlad chuckled. "Is every school

dance like this?", Bruno asked. Vlad nodded. "Yup", Vlad replied. "I can't wait to be formal king tonight", he added.

They reached their class. "Hey Bruno and Vlad!", Winnie greeted. "Care for some mint?", Roselynn asked. Bruno chuckled. "No thanks!", he answered. The two sat beside Alex. The class formed a circle and sat in chairs. A giant circle table was in front of them.

The class was talking about typical middle school things. Confessions, silly stories, all of that. Bruno also joined in, but not as much as everyone else. Bruno's shyness does prevent him from socializing like others. Luckily, he shares that trait with Alex.

Bruno and Alex talked a lot to each other during the party. They enjoyed each other's company and they'd like to call each other best friends at this point of their relationship.

Everyone enjoyed their best friends' company.

It was a fun night thus far. The lights, the music, the decorations really set up a great atmosphere.

… Even the food!

Laurel went up to a food table that was installed in the main hall, which is where the party is taking place. Laurel puts in her giant pizza box and ate a lot of it. Ivon approached her while she was eating her third slice.

"Hey Laurel. Want to dance together?", Ivon asked, blushing a little. Mercury and Kyanide were behind Ivon.

Laurel swallowed her slice then smiled. "Sure!", she replied. Ivon sweated, turned his head back to Mercury. Mercury grinned and gave a "thumbs up" to assure Ivon. Ivon gulped as he pulled Laurel to the dance floor. They danced a two-step that wowed everyone in the floor.

Mr. Spin came up to the stage as soon as Ivon and Laurel stopped dancing. "Everyone! It's time to announce the formal's king and queen", Mr. Spin announced.

Everyone looked at Mr. Spin attentively. Beside him were Mr. Gregory and Mrs. Kiara, standing still. Even the teachers were watching, who were all in the right corner of the hall. They mingled before.

"Our formal king and queen are: Ivon Garden and Laurel Lopez!", Mr. Spin declared. Everyone clapped and whistled together. Ivon and Laurel smiled while. Meanwhile, Vlad watched in anger. Ivon and Laurel went on stage and wear their crowns. "Congratulations!", Mr. Spin sang while spining. Ivon blushed when looking at Laurel. He could only look at the side of her face.

After that, things were sedimentary. Everyone was slow and either talking to each other or eating. Only some were dancing.

The DJ, who was Chila, a student of Class 3, kept playing music even if nobody was willing to dance. He played slowed, calming songs instead of upbeat songs though.

Amidst all of this were Aster and Blossom sitting in a confide seat. They weren't even with the rest of Team Toxic.

Bruno was watching them since they were behind him. Alex tapped Bruno's shoulder. "Bruno, I'll go and check up on August, ok?", Alex told Bruno. Bruno nodded, not saying anything but looking at Alex. Alex got out of his seat and walked away. Bruno sighed since he was lonely. Vlad was with the rest of Team Toxic while the rest of Class 2 were busy with each other.

Bruno went to Aster and Blossom since he had nobody else to be with. He knew things would be risky if he approached them, but he didn't care.

Bruno sat on the seat that was beside their table. The table was small and there were only four seats, so it was perfect for the three.

"Hey guys", Bruno greeted while gulping and sweating. "Hey Bruno! We were wondering when you'd come", Blossom greeted

back. Bruno gasped. “You were?”, Bruno asked. Aster nodded, sighing a bit. “I think we’re starting to warm up to you…”, Aster said. Bruno chuckled. “That’s great!”, Bruno said.

“Honestly, I was a bit scared to join Team Toxic because you guys kept bullying me”, Bruno added. Aster and Blossom stared at Bruno. “Really?”, Aster asked. Bruno nodded.

“But I’m not really scared anymore!”, Bruno said. Blossom smiled warmly while Aster scowled.

Things were silent for a bit until someone broke it. It was Bruno who broke the silence.

“This formal is boring, isn’t it?”, Bruno asked. Aster nodded. “Definitely!”, Aster replied. “We hate school dances. We can’t even do the boogie!”, Blossom snickered. Bruno laughed. “I can’t either”, he replied. The three laughed. “Glad to meet someone who hates parties as much as us”, Aster said. “I’m glad too!”, Blossom added.

“Hmm… Maybe you’re not as bad as I thought…”, Aster suddenly said to Bruno. Bruno’s eyes watered up, smiling.

“Well, I’ve been thinking the same to you guys while we were going through what we just went through the past two weeks”, Bruno replied quickly. About that…”, Aster said. “We’ve been thinking about it for a while!”, Blossom continued. “I have been too. It’s crazy. I mean, we’re the chosen ones or something? That’s just unbelievable!”, Bruno said.

“What’s more unbelievable to me is that book you wrote”, Aster replied, almost sarcastically. “Oh yeah…”, Bruno said. Bruno took his red backpack off of his back. “Do you always bring your backpack anywhere you go?”, Aster said. Bruno smiled while taking out something. “Better safe than sorry. I’ve got lots of things in here”, Bruno responded. Blossom snickered.

Bruno pulled out the Extraordinary books. “I still haven’t figured out what any of this means”, Bruno sighed. Blossom took the books

and tried to touch it for… some reason? “What are you doing?”, Bruno asked.

“My mom always says that a mysterious book might be hiding hidden texts”, Blossom said. Bruno raised his eyebrow. “Really? My dad told me the same thing, though it’s more understandable since he’s an investigator cop”, Bruno said. “And you can find out about hidden texts… how?”, Aster asked.

“By touching it. If you feel like pen or pencil marks are there, then there’s definitely something written”, Blossom said. “I don’t know though…”, she sighed while giving back the books. Bruno frowned, taking the books back to the backpack and wearing it again. “It’s fine. Maybe my dad can help”, Bruno assured.

A song was playing in the background. Old songs were being played in the background. Nobody in the student crowd even knew what these songs are, and they couldn’t care less. The staff knew though, and they enjoyed it from Chila.

Bruno, Aster and Blossom were talking.

They were mumbling some of their words, yet they were laughing.

Bruno could never imagine even getting along with the three.

“Maybe they really aren’t who they say they were”, Bruno thought, remembering what he thought of them earlier.

He thought the same for the entirety of Team Toxic, minus maybe Vlad, but even he seems intimidating, mainly for his fangs.

Aster and Blossom also thought the same. They thought Bruno was just a weak boy who wasn’t even close to special, but maybe they were wrong all along.

A song was playing called “Dancing In The Moonlight”. As soon as that song played, Bruno got up. “I think I’ll call it for the night. My mom’s already calling me”, he declared.

Without Aster and Blossom saying anything, Bruno got out of the main hall and reached to the parking lot, where he thought his mother would be. However, she wasn't there.

"Maybe she's a little late…", Bruno assumed. Bruno walked to the gate of the school, which is where he sat down and stared at the street floor. He was waiting and waiting for his mother. The rest of Team Toxic came to Bruno. "Hey Bruno! Going now?", Vlad asked.

Bruno turned back just to see Team Toxic. "Oh. Yeah, I am. My mom's late though", Bruno answered, a bit disappointment. "Goodbye then! Have a great night", Laurel wished, holding her trophy. Bruno grinned. "Thanks guys. Have a great night too", Bruno wished while getting up.

Behind him was his mother's car. She slid down her window to say something. "Bruno! I'm so sorry for coming late. Your brother's just been begging me to get milkshakes from McDonalds, so I did. I bought some for you too", his mother apologized. Bruno stared at the chocolate milkshake. "Thanks mom!", Bruno thanked. "I bought two more because of an offer too", his mother added.

Bruno turned back to his friends and waved goodbye. Before he could reach the back door, Aster and Blossom came out of the gate. "Bruno! Can we come with you?", Aster asked. Bruno looked at Aster and Blossom, weirdly. He was outside of his door. "Why?", Bruno asked. "Our parents can't take us, so…", Blossom said. Bruno lit up. "Oh! Ok! Come on in then", Bruno replied. His mother smiled and chuckled. Aster and Blossom hopped onto the car.

Their car was a lot worse than Bruno's, they thought. Team Toxic waved goodbye at the three, who slid their window. They left off for the night. The moon was in front of them. The engine started and drove to their homes for the night. The song was in their heads, playing through the ride through the yawning night.

The End!